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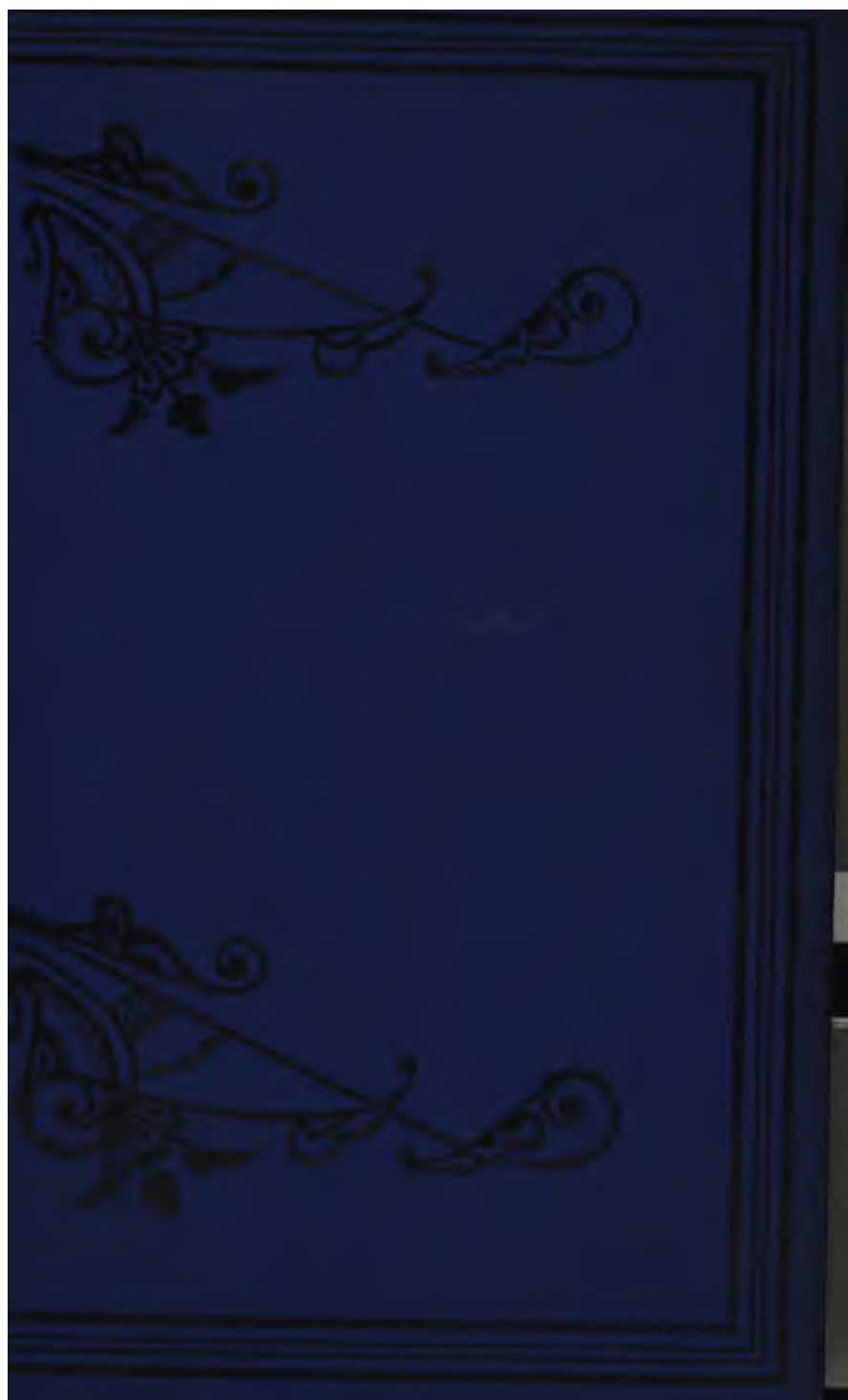
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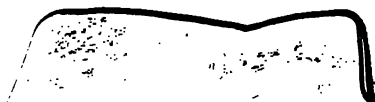
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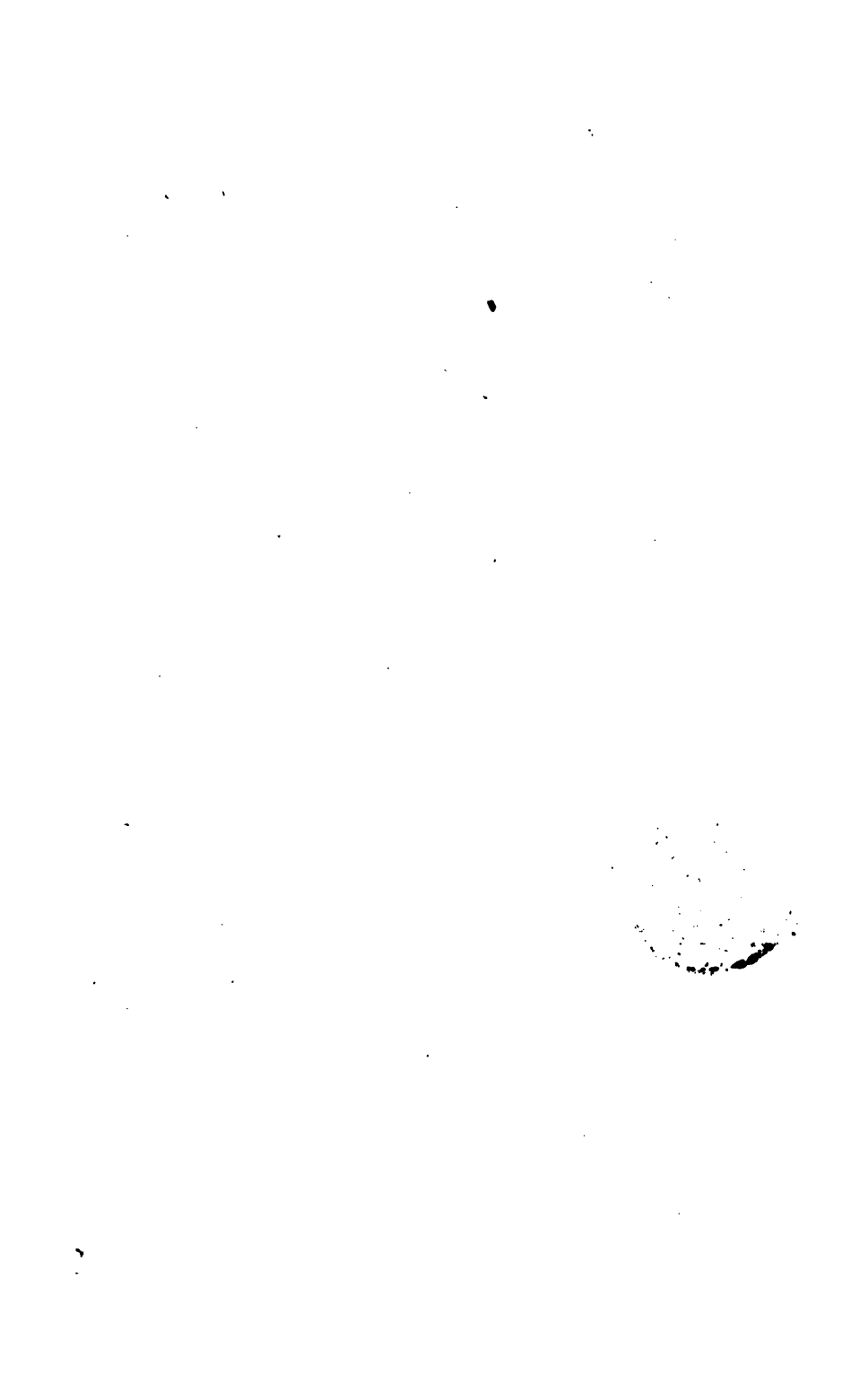
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A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

J Nobel.

BY

LADY HARDY.

"The lovers that disbelieve
False rumours shall grieve,
And evil-speaking shall part."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1872.

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249. y. 597.



A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER I.

IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

AFTER a storm comes a calm," is a truism which exemplifies itself every day of our lives. The frantic excitement which had shaken Mr. Maitland's brain at the opera, the distracting influence of the music, the gas-lights, and the old associations roused by his finding himself once more among the old scenes and in such a changed position, had for the time completely upset his mind; but with the cool breath of the morning there came a calm to his mind. Philippa had been

amazed at his returning home in such a plight; but she asked no questions seeing he was in no state to answer them. In spite of her repressed feelings she was full of a woman's curiosity to know what had happened. She had been up some hours, and at work at her easel, when her father made his appearance next morning. She put it aside as he came in and bid him a cheerful "good mórning," shook up the cushions, and wheeled his chair into the cosiest place; then she gave him his spectacles and the *Times*, which he always read as he took his coffee. Then, as she proceeded to prepare the breakfast, she chatted to him upon such items of news as had caught her eye, but mentioned no word of what she was dying to hear.

She had forgotten to put his violin aside, and it was the first thing that caught his eye, as he glanced aimlessly

round the room. It had been his friend for so many years, the soother and comforter of so many miserable hours, that he had learned to love it as a living thing. Seeing it lying there tuneless and broken, he knew he should never hear its tender voice again. The recollection it brought to his mind was too much for him; he took it up—smashed as it was—laid his head upon it, burst into tears, and told Philippa all that had occurred, of his passionate delight, his folly, and his madness, which had once more thrown away their means of bread. She played the part of consoler, as most women on such an occasion would; and told him that the enthusiasm which had brought about so painful a result was rather a virtue than not, and showed that he had an appreciative and impulsive soul which ran away with his reason. He was not slow to be reconciled to himself, and ate

and enjoyed his breakfast, his enjoyment being by no means weakened by the knowledge of his fault. Philippa assured him that she was getting on so well with her drawing that she should find no difficulty in supporting them both; but, in spite of her assumed cheerfulness, her heart sank as she wondered what Jasper would say when he heard of the fiasco that had followed her father's first night at the opera! He had fought and exerted all his influence for months to obtain for him the position he had lost in the first hour of its attainment.

Jasper Brantynham generally timed his visits and made his appearance at a certain hour. Philippa always knew when to expect his well-known step upon the stair. Mr. Maitland grew fidgety and proposed to go out, so as to avoid him till Philippa had explained matters to her friend, and set things in their old groove again. He

was always ready to push her to the front when there was anything unpleasant to be done, and she was always ready to go. Accordingly he went forth on his daily peregrinations much earlier than usual.

He had been gone scarcely half an hour when Jasper made his appearance. She had no need to tell him anything; he had heard all that was to be told from other sources, and there was an angry flush upon his cheek and a fixed expression in his eyes which would not be easily dispelled. When he found himself in her presence, and she in her fresh womanly beauty came forward to meet him with hand, heart, and lips, he tried to hide his disturbed feelings from her. But it was no use, she knew that they were there, and she admitted to herself, as well as to him, that he had grave cause for annoyance and vexation; as, to a certain extent, his word was pledged in good faith

for Mr. Maitland's eligibility, but his conduct had failed to redeem it. No reliance, he saw, could be placed upon him in any way; his very genius was of that wild uncertain character, it would have been well if he could have exchanged it for an ounce of steady common sense. It is a pity that so few men of genius are accredited with that article. Genius is so often made an excuse for follies of the wildest description, that some folk are inclined to think it would be as well if the world had been made without it.

"I cannot bear to talk to you of unpleasant subjects," said Jasper, as they sat hand in hand talking over the matter; "but we must talk of your father, and forget ourselves for the moment. You must see how little he is to be trusted."

"I see," she answered, her lip quivering as she spoke. She was jealous for her

father's sake; she knew Jasper did not look on him with her eyes, and she fancied he did not appreciate his genius nor esteem his character as she thought it deserved; she would have been aghast if she had known Jasper's real opinion of the father she so loved and honoured. "Dear papa!" she added, "he is so warm-hearted, so nobly enthusiastic, he is not fit for a common place, or to be trammelled by the adverse circumstances of this common world; he ought to be a rich man."

"He has been that," rejoined Jasper; "it is no use for us to shut our eyes to the fact, darling. He has had wealth, great wealth, and you know the use, or rather misuse, he has made of it."

"He was too generous, too trustful," murmured poor Philippa, who could not gainsay his words. "Don't speak harshly of him, please, Jasper," she added, lifting her

grand grey eyes pleadingly to his face; "of course I don't expect *you* to feel for him as *I* do. I am his child, and I know his motives, his thoughts, and his intentions; you only judge him by his actions."

"It is so that all men must judge one another in this world, darling," he answered; "the motive power of a man's mind is such a complicated piece of machinery, we have neither the time to study nor power to comprehend it. But of what use is the best of motives when they miscarry by the way, and result in the most lamentable actions? Once for all, Philippa dearest, we must look at things as they stand; it would be evident even to the blindest eyes that your father is incapable of doing anything either to help himself or you."

"I am afraid that is true," she answered, slowly, compelled to admit the fact. "You

see, Jasper, papa has such a refined intellect, such an enthusiastic and fanciful nature that—that he cannot walk in the narrow grooves of everyday life as other men do. And it is no matter; there is really no need now,” she added, proudly; “I can work and earn enough for us both. Sometimes I think—did it never strike you?—that some of us are so constituted that we cannot exactly help our faults; they will crop up in spite of our best endeavours to keep them down?”

“No,” he answered, drawing her to him and kissing her tenderly; “but it has always struck me that you are the most generous, sweet, and noble girl in all the world. When I think of your solitary struggles, your patient self-sacrifices—ay, sacrifices, I will say it, Philippa—that are but thanklessly received, I am ashamed of myself; ashamed to feel that *I* who love

you have stood quietly by and seen you sacrifice *yourself* for *him*."

"Hush," exclaimed Philippa, laying her hand upon his lips; "don't speak so, don't think so; one cannot sacrifice too much for one's father, especially when he is as helpless and as weak as mine. You love me, Jasper, I *know* you do; and for my sake you must bear with him."

"For *your* sake I would bear almost anything," he said, taking her face between his two hands and looking with a proud strong love upon her; "but I am getting somewhat of a tyrant, and I will not have *you* bear so much as you have been bearing."

"Oh! I don't mind; it is nothing," she exclaimed, interrupting him eagerly. "I am so accustomed to papa's ways, I should not like him to be other than he is; but I cannot bear his little peculiarities to vex and annoy *you*. I would rather you would be

cold, cruel, and unkind to *me* than to *him*."

"You cannot justly accuse me of being either," replied Jasper, slightly wounded. "I have done everything in my power to uphold him in the world's eyes and in his own."

"Oh yes, yes! I know," said Philippa; "but you don't understand, you won't understand me. He is my father and I can't defend him; and—and it breaks my heart to think that yours is turning against him. Do try to be patient with him, and don't, for my sake, don't speak of him harshly!"

"Philippa," replied Jasper, his brow flushed and his voice full of feeling, "I do understand you now; and if ever I speak a harsh word of your father again, I will bite out my tongue and throw it to the dogs. My own noble-hearted darling! I will take

him for better or worse, as, please God, I hope to take you."

Philippa's eyes looked all the gratitude her tongue refused to utter; he put his arms round her and sealed his promise with a kiss. There was no need of further words between them on that subject, they both felt that, and for a time silence fell between them. People who love one another very dearly do not always want to be talking. The silent, sympathetic presence of their love suffices for all speech. To her the mere fact of his presence was bliss extreme, and to him the very sight of her face, "made glorious by her love," brought with it a supreme joy, and all he had ever known of the world's pleasures paled before it; he felt there could be thenceforth no world for him if she had no place therein.

After awhile they talked in snatches. Philippa went to her easel, and he took up

his book and began reading aloud to her as usual. Presently the book was thrown aside and he said—

“I’m too excited to read; come, put by your work and come out in the sunshine. It is a lovely day and a walk will do you good; besides, I want to talk to you, I’ve got a great deal to say.” His desire was her law and she obeyed him gladly. He could not bear to walk through the crowded streets, especially with her, so they drove in a cab to Kensington Gardens, and got out there and walked about under the shadow of the grand old trees, and there he said a great deal of what he desired to say, but not all.

“I have been thinking very much of you and your father,” he said, as they sauntered under the green branches, “and I’ve come to the conclusion that things cannot and ought not to go on like this much longer.”

“Like what?” inquired Philippa.

“Oh well, don't you see I might as well be tethered to a milestone, for any real comfort or help I can be to you, situated as we are.”

“But you are a help and a comfort too,” she answered, a warm glow suffusing her cheeks. “You know how much you are to me, and how beautiful you have made my life that was so blank and bare before; as for things not going on as they are, I'm sure, as far as we are concerned, I hope they will never change.”

“But that's nonsense,” he answered; “you can't suppose we can go on for ever like this. Do you think that you or I would be always content with these daily meetings and partings; content to live always away from the world's eyes as circumstances compel us to live *now*? I am not one of those who hide *their light* under a bushel. *You* are my light, *Philippa*, and I don't like this

half-and-half way of possessing you. I feel like a fellow who owns a beautiful jewel and is obliged to keep it in his waistcoat pocket. I want to take you out into the world—my world—that it may open its lazy old eyes and admire *you* and envy *me*.” He looked fondly and proudly on the beautiful upturned face as he was speaking, and she answered him—

“But, Jasper, my world lies between you and my father, and I don’t want to go an inch beyond it.”

“Ay, but, my darling Philippa,” he rejoined, in a matter-of-fact tone, “you must please to recollect that in circumscribing your life to one narrow sphere you also put a boundary to *mine*. Now I don’t profess to be a self-sacrificing character; quite the reverse. I am rather a selfish, exacting party.”

Philippa could not help uttering a depre-

cating "Oh!" at this self-defamation of character.

"I am not happy away from you, that's the truth," he continued. "I cannot make out life quite to my mind without you, and I want you for my own—my very own—to be with me always, and our lives and interests to be one. Besides, although no doubt you find Mr. Maitland's company very delightful, yet I don't think it is right that you should waste the glorious season of your youth and beauty shut up in two rooms, with the occasional companionship of one old man, though he has the happiness of being your father. No, don't speak, please; I know all you are going to say about being very happy and all that sort of thing, but I know better. The fondest affection cannot bring about any congeniality between youth and age; they can have no thought, no hope, no aspi-

ration in common, except in the matter of daily bread. Why, child," he added, a tender earnest love filling his grave voice, "your soul is being starved out; the very freshness of your nature is fading and fainting for that sympathetic sunshiny life that lies beyond your own threshold." He stopped as though he thought that she would answer him, but she did not, she could not; in her heart she felt all that his words implied, but she would not allow her lips to admit as much. After a momentary pause he added quickly—

"Philippa, have you ever wondered why I have never asked you point-blank to marry me?"

"No," she answered, promptly, "I never have. I have never wished you to ask me, because I know it could never be."

"Can never be!" he exclaimed, echoing

her words as a light bantering mood came over him. "Why, how tragically you say that! Are you suddenly gifted with second sight? or are you pre-contracted? or do you think I'm inclined to play the fictitiously fashionable game of bigamy, and fancy that some six-foot high grenadier in petticoats will start up at the altar and claim me as 'her own'? or do you know of any just law or impediment that should prevent my taking you for better or worse?"

"No," she said, smiling back at him; "but my duty to my father will keep me always at his side. I would not have you take upon yourself a double burden, a penniless wife and her helpless father."

"You are such a precious prize, my Philippa, that your father thrown into the scale would be but a feather's weight," replied Jasper.

honour, and obey me for the term of your natural life. In heaven's name, Philippa, how else did you think our engagement was to end?"

"I don't believe I ever thought about its ending at all," she answered, with downcast eyes. "Through all the dark days of my life you have been all the world to me. I suppose it was foolish to give way, to allow myself to be so foolishly happy, knowing it must all end some day."

"The end will be of your own choosing," he said, as he stalked on rather grimly by her side.

"It is cruel and unlike you to speak in that cold way," she answered. "You know if I could choose what my choice would be. Life, any life, with you would be worth living for; without you—well, I suppose we shall both forget one day." She tried to steady her voice and succeeded, but

she kept her face turned away, lest he should see how much she was feeling.

“We seldom forget things we wish to remember,” he answered, still in an offended tone. “I don’t think either you or I could ever forget the mark these last few months have made upon our lives; such hours are not lived to be forgotten.”

“Forgotten! ah, no! perhaps never forgotten,” she murmured, in her low, tremulous voice; “but how remembered, Jasper? how differently remembered? these foolish, happy days! A day may come when you will have forgotten the sound of my voice, and time will have so blurred and blotted your memory with other matters, that you will remember nothing that belongs to these days but perhaps a pair of grey eyes that belonged to a girl named Philippa. Of course you’ll marry some day, and I shouldn’t wonder if you some-

times talk of me to *her*—your wife, I mean.”

“Very likely I shall,” he rejoined, in a determined voice, as though he had made up his mind and resolved that nothing should disturb it. “I think you’re fond of retrospection, Philippa, and I mean to have no other wife but *you*.”

“You speak from compassion,” she answered, “and I will not take advantage of your generous impulse. You have done enough for us already, more than enough. I am ashamed when I think of all the trouble and care we have been to you, and you don’t know what you have been to us.”

“Neither do you know what *you* have been to *me*,” he rejoined, in a tone of deep, earnest passion.

“Small comfort, I fear,” she answered, looking up in his face, while her hand tightened on his arm.

“I am not going to rant and rave about love like a stricken boy,” he rejoined, and his face was pale and his features set. “I have outlived the days of early romance and fanciful tender passions; but, come it early or come it late, the one great passion comes but once in a man’s life. It has come to mine now. I have lived a purer and better life since I have loved *you*. You are beautiful enough to drive a man mad, Philippa, but it is not for your beauty’s sake I love you, but for yourself. I know your love is a prize worth winning, and I have sometimes thought it was mine already.”

“Yours always, Jasper,” she answered, lifting her great humid grey eyes to his. “It was yours before you asked for it. I love you fortyfold better than you ever could have loved *me*; but if, as you say, the time has come when things must change, why,

the change can bring us no nearer together; there must be a drifting apart."

"Must there! why?" he inquired, quietly, and not at all as though he was afraid of her answer.

"Because," she answered, excitedly, "if I gave way, as you are anxious now I should, you would bitterly repent one day, and soon, when you found into what a depth of trouble your blind, generous folly had led you."

"Your indefinite sentimental phraseology has more sound than sense in it," he said, impatiently. "Anyone would suppose I was walking blindfolded into an abyss of unfathomable miseries; whereas, in simple fact, I merely propose to marry you, the girl I love, and to take upon my broad shoulders a portion of your troubles! As for your father——"

"Ay, there's where it is!" she exclaimed,

interrupting him excitedly, "my dear father—I can bear with him because I love him; you do not, and he might do things to make you ashamed of him. You are a very proud man, Jasper, and through him you might grow ashamed of *me*, and—and I could not bear it, I should break my heart; that is why I think it is better we should part. Besides, there is *your* father to be considered; he may have formed other views for you."

"No doubt," he answered; "but you see, Philippa, my father's son happens to have formed peculiar views of his own. I am glad you refer to my father; I want to explain to you that it is only out of consideration for him that I have not touched upon the question of our marriage before. The fact is, he is an old man, and in a very precarious state of health, and, being a very excitable, passionate man, the least mental

disturbance might at any moment prove fatal to him—so say his medical advisers. I believe he has encouraged ideas on my account which I am never likely to adopt. I could not, under existing circumstances, propose an alliance to him which he had not himself first projected and approved. So you see, as I cannot hope to marry with his consent, I shall marry without it, your consent being sufficient for that purpose."

"But, Jasper——"

"But, Philippa," he said, imitatively, "it is no use your advancing any farther arguments against my will, because I shall knock them down as fast as you set them up. I wont speak of ourselves," he added, looking down upon her with a smile that made her heart bound within her, "there is no need; but we must look beyond ourselves. Suppose you did not care for me a bit—if such a dreadful thing could

be supposed—it would still be necessary you should marry me, and sacrifice yourself once more for your father's sake. As your husband I can protect both him and you; but situated as we are now my hands are tied, I can do nothing. And there is one thing more I must say, Philippa: I do not like the idea of my wife that is to be—the future mistress of Brantynham Hall—working for her bread. Difficulties are thickening round you, and I will not have it so for another day.”

Philippa's lips rebelled, but more and more feebly, against his proposal for a speedy marriage; against herself, against her own loving, yearning soul she pleaded, but her heart, and all her desires were with him; she rejoiced as he insisted, and at last it was decided that all should be as he willed it.

On returning to Great Marylebone

Street, they found Mr. Maitland in a state of frenzied excitement; he seemed almost beside himself. On seeing Mr. Brantynham he lifted up his hands and exclaimed deprecatingly—

“It is no use your reproaching me; it has all gone—all, every penny. You may put me in prison if you like, but it was no fault of mine. I’ve done the best I could, I’ve always done the best I could.”

“What does he mean?” exclaimed Philippa, turning pale with apprehension.

“Nothing; nothing at least that need trouble you,” replied Jasper. “A little transaction between your father and me; that is all. Go to your room, darling; we can arrange matters better between ourselves.”

Mr. Maitland continued in a weak maundering way to exculpate himself, murmuring half aloud, “It was no fault of mine, I put it all on Lady Flora—it is an unlucky

name—I'm always unlucky. It might have happened to anybody; but you're so hard—you're always hard on me." Mr. Brantynham did not speak to interrupt him, but he drew Philippa aside to the window recess; but before he could speak she exclaimed, in an eager whisper—

"You have been lending him money, and we can never repay you—never, dear Jasper! You see how things are; they are getting worse and worse. You have done too much for us already. For your own sake you had better shake hands and part."

"For what do you take me? for a hound, a cur to turn tail and run at the signal of distress! No! no! Philippa, the greater your need, the stronger you will find my love. I have seen this propensity for—it is an offensive word, but I must use it—gambling growing upon your father. We

must do what we can to restrain and guide him. You, poor frail child, are powerless; you must feel that, and—— But you will trust me with yourself, my darling! you will trust me with him.”

“Oh! Jasper, Jasper! I give so little and take so much,” whispered Philippa, laying her head upon his shoulder, as in the deepening twilight they kissed and said “Good night.”





CHAPTER II.

LAUNCHED AT LAST.

THAT most delightful business of a girl's life, the arrangement and getting together the wedding trousseau, was a brief and most unimportant affair to Philippa Maitland. The wedding was to be a strictly private one in every sense of the word, and Jasper was anxious for many reasons that it should take place as speedily as possible. He had taken things quietly enough all along; now he would fain have hurried matters in an unseemly fashion. He did not see why he could not get a licence and be married at once, or at least

within a day or two. Philippa, however, managed to satisfy him at last by fixing a day some few weeks off. She had very little to do by way of making preparations, she acknowledged, but she must have time to think; the change seemed so great, so sudden, she felt dazed at first, even in contemplation of it.

Mrs. Titkins of course was taken into the confidence of the family, and rejoiced greatly at the change in their prospects.

“Going to be married, Miss Philippa! Well, I’m not a bit surprised—quite contrarywise; I’ve been expecting it every day for the last month, and twice last week I dreamt of fire! And it’s Mr. Brantynham, of course? Well he’s a fine-looking gentleman, nigh on six feet, I should say, without his shoes. He’s a little too proud and off-handed in his ways for me, my dear, but that’s nothing; it wont prevent his being a very good

husband to you. Well, to be sure, heart alive, we must begin to look about us. It will be a proud and happy day for me. I'll keep the shutters up, and you shall have a breakfast on the first floor, with the folding doors wide open, as wouldn't disgrace a nobleman, and I dare say we'll have a brass band coming along and all the neighbours on the look out, and the beautiful bridesmaids with their wails and trains a streaming up the stairs! why——"

"Why, dear Martha," exclaimed Philippa, stemming the torrent of her volubility at last, "I am sorry to dull your brilliant imagination, but there will be no bridesmaids, no cake, no breakfast, no veils, no flowers, no anything that generally celebrates such occasions. We shall just walk, Jasper and I, to Marylebone Church, and be married quietly, with only my dear father and you for witnesses." Mrs. Titkins

stared at her in amazement, as though doubting the evidence of her own eyes and ears. Philippa looked radiantly happy and content, which, under existing circumstances, puzzled Mrs. Titkins extremely.

"Miss Philippa," she exclaimed, beginning in solemn seriousness culminating to a point of indignant unbelief, "do you mean to say as you're going to walk to church in a hat! with no wail! no orange blossoms! no bridesmaids! nor no nothing at all as makes a wedding pleasant! Well, I call that a mean, sneaking, backstairs sort of way of getting married, just as though you was doing something you was ashamed on. You might as well go to a dirty perlice office, which it's a disgrace to a civilized land, and they marry people with door-keys and brass curtain-rings, I've heard. Oh! dear Miss Philippa, do think better of it! It never happens but once in a girl's

life—the orange-flowers, wails, and all that part of it, I mean; for though some are lucky enough to get a second venture, bonnets is the correct thing for widders, wails and orange-flowers not being thought circumspect.”

“My dear Martha, pray don’t talk like that!” said Philippa, hastily. “I don’t care for those highly decorative weddings; we are both much too happy to care for outward show. Under any circumstances I should have preferred a quiet wedding; as circumstances are it is positively necessary, and Mr. Brantynham says——”

“And I know what I say and what I think,” interrupted Mrs. Titkins; “I don’t believe in your not caring about a fine wedding. It’s as natural for a girl to like to go off well with flowers and wails and bridesmaids as ’tis for a squirrel to crack nuts; and I don’t think much of a man as’ll rob

a girl of the privilege of her sect. 'Tain't proper nor respectful to you, Miss Philippa, being a lady born, though poor and oppressed now. Why, there was Miss Wells, the grocer's daughter over the way, she was married last summer. All the neighbourhood was alive; all the windows open and everybody lookin' out, the band playin' 'Hymen gay,' and the school children throwin' flowers for her to walk on, in her beautiful wail and orange-flowers. Oh! it was a lovely sight! And to think of my darling child being married like a scrub!" The contrast was too great—her excited feelings found vent in tears.

Seeing that Philippa remained immovably content, her envy being in no way awakened by the grandeur of Miss Wells's wedding, Mrs. Titkins privately resolved to attack Mr. Brantynham on the subject. She watched for the hour of his coming,

put on her best cap with its smartest ribbons, polished her face till it shone again, and decorated it with her broadest smiles. When he knocked at the door she sent the boy to admit him, and when he strode forward to mount the stairs as usual, he found her planted straight in his way, smiling and nodding significantly.

“May I make so bold as to wish you joy, sir, and plenty of it, which I do with all my heart for poor Miss Philippa’s sake, and”—she glanced furtively round as though she was afraid of being overheard, then added in a whisper—“would you mind stepping into my parlour—it isn’t a grand room, but clean and wholesome—I’ve got something to say private and confidential, as the lawyers call it.” He followed her into her back parlour in a state of unsuspecting innocence, fancying she had some unliquided bills to bring forward or some private

communication to make concerning Mr. Maitland; but, greatly to his surprise, she commenced in a half-plaintive, injured tone—

“Miss Philippa has told me all about it, sir, as it was quite natural she should—she knowed I’d sympathize with her and she’s got nobody but me to take her part; and I thought if you’d only listen quietly to what I’ve got to say you’d change your mind, for I’m sure she feels it and is only giving way to please you; but if you’ll look at things in the right light, I don’t believe you’d ask her to do it.”

“In heaven’s name, what’s the woman talking about!” exclaimed Mr. Brantynham, an angry impatient frown darkening his brow.

“Well, sir,” replied Martha, ruffling her feathers in her turn, “you needn’t put yourself out and speak that contemptuous; there’s no harm in my being a woman, leastways I wouldn’t care to change. But that’s neither

as ever was, and I wish Miss Philippa joy of him, that's all."

This interview slightly discomposed Jasper Brantynham, as he did not see the necessity of taking Mrs. Titkins into confidence about the matter at all; but he said nothing, and made no allusion to Philippa on the subject of her friend Martha's presuming to address him. But when Philippa proposed that Martha should go to the church and sign the register as one of the witnesses, he rebelled stoutly against the proposition, and would by no means agree to it; indeed Martha herself was so disgusted at the arrangement of the whole affair, it is doubtful if she would consent to be present even at her darling Miss Philippa's entreaty. Mrs. Titkins could sometimes be inexorable even to her. She half whispered an insinuation into Mr. Titkins' ear that there was some trick going

dulled the great joy that filled her heart.

Although Mrs. Titkins had held aloof while the affair was pending, yet when the actual day arrived she found her way to her darling's side, and fluttered about, helping and aiding her in a hundred tender ways; taking elaborate care in the arrangement of her dress, that every fold of her skirt fell in the right place. Having at last helped to put the finishing touch to her toilette, she walked round her, inspecting and admiring her at all points, and admitted that she looked "lovely," and even the wail and wreath of orange-flowers would have added nothing to her attractions. Philippa had taken great pains to adorn herself for this loving surrender of self and liberty, heart and hand, to Jasper Brantynham. She wore a dress of shimmering pearl-grey silk trimmed with soft white swansdown, and a

bonnet (if the style of head-dress lately worn can be called a bonnet) of delicate lace, with just a suspicion of orange flowers nestling in a mossy bed of blush roses.

The whole affair was carried out in the most unorthodox fashion. The clock had scarcely struck eleven when the bridegroom made his appearance to escort his bride to the church himself. Mr. Maitland of course accompanied them, in a state of joyful satisfaction ; he seemed to see his way clear through the world at last. Mrs. Titkins was spared the dreadful scandal of seeing her darling walk to church, for Mr. Brantynham handed her into a handsome brougham, with a pair of the stereotyped grey horses. As they drove up to the solemn-looking church, and in at the huge clumsy iron gates, the crossing-sweeper ran across the road and began vigorously plying his brush on the church-steps, sweeping the dust from

beneath the fair bride's feet, and, smiling up roguishly in the bridegroom's face, begged a bit of silver "for love of the beautiful lady." One or two other stragglers paused a moment and stared, as the lovely face flashed past them and in at the open doors.

The large empty church, with its dark oaken high-backed pews, had an unutterably dreary deserted aspect, and the atmosphere struck with a vault-like chillness on Philippa. She shivered and drew her mantle closer round her as she crossed the threshold. The morning sun was streaming in at the stained-glass window, lighting up the atmosphere here and there with prismatic colours, and tinting the marble tablets which adorned or disfigured the walls of the church and chronicled the names of many who "had departed this life, late of this parish." But the light flickering hither and thither threw the shadows into deeper shade, and only

served to make the gloom more visible. The grand organ frowned down upon the deserted aisles still and voiceless, and altogether the church had a mouldy, mildewed appearance, as though it had lately been disestablished, and could not recover itself even on the present important occasion of Philippa's wedding.

At the first glance round, the church seemed to be empty indeed, but on the second more searching look round a solemn-looking verger, tall and thin, like an animated gaspipe, was seen coming slowly down the aisle; then a stout, asthmatic pew-opener loomed upon their sight, and curtsied and smiled with pious benignity upon the bride as she walked towards the altar, where the single unassisted clergyman stood awaiting, the clerk alone being in attendance to utter the requisite "Amens."

The ceremony was quietly and reverently

performed, and a more queenlike, regal bride never stood before the most fashionable altar in this great metropolis. No bevy of bridesmaids fluttered round her, no gaily-dressed assemblage of sympathetic friends looked on, no wedding bells were to be ringing; but the solemn simplicity of the service gained by the absence of these things. There was nothing to distract the attention of the chief actors in the sacred social drama; they were absorbed in themselves or in each other, and felt to the fullest extent the importance of the irrevocable step they were taking. The invisible past was closing behind them, and beyond these altar-rails the curtain was slowly rising on a new life, which they must meet together. The three solitary figures, that of the white-haired old man with a feeble smile flickering over his face, the stalwart bridegroom with his manly figure and grand expressive

countenance, and the bride with her marvellous classic beauty of face and figure—these three, taken in at a glance as they stood there, looked like the centre figures of a poetical picture, shadowy as yet, but to be fully painted by the action of their lives.

The ceremony was over; the register duly signed by those present. Mr. Maitland returned home to Great Marylebone Street, where Mr. and Mrs. Titkins had received strict charge concerning him. Mr. and Mrs. Brantynham re-entered the carriage and drove straight to the railway station en route for Paris, their luggage having been forwarded the night before. All thought of care or sorrow seemed blotted out of Philippa's life, or, at least for the present, out of her memory; she could hardly understand herself, or how it was there was so much happiness in the world, and so large a share had fallen to her! She could not

have conceived the possibility of feeling so saturated, body and soul, with joy. She leaned back in the carriage with closed eyes, silent and absorbed, with her hand clasped in his who was now her husband. Jasper contemplated the beautiful face fondly and proudly for a moment, and then said—

“What is it, Queenie?” a name he had coined for her that morning. “Why are you so silent?”

The radiant eyes were lifted to his in answer—

“I am trying to thank God for giving you to me. And—oh, Jasper! I pray that you may love me always—always!”

“Small doubt of that,” he answered, confidently. “I have often thought it must be a woman’s own fault if she does not bind a man and keep him her slave till the end of her life, and sometimes after.”

She shook her head as if she doubted it, but before she had time to answer they turned into Charing Cross Station, and as they reached the platform the bell rang for the train to start. They rushed into the first compartment they could find, and had just time to settle down into the only vacant seats therein, when the engine shrieked and snorted like an impatient steed, and started from the platform. After a brief but uninteresting journey over and among the London chimney-pots they glided out into the open country, and were carried at express speed on their way to Folkestone. The compartment being full, they had no chance for further conversation, and indeed they were content to be silent.

They soon reached the pier at Folkestone, where the Boulogne boat with her steam half-on awaited the arrival of the train. They were soon on board, and Philippa

was horrified at the maltreatment of the passengers' luggage as it was hurled, twirled, and sent thundering down the sliding platform on to the deck. One, a lady's trunk, burst open with a groan, and its contents—smart dresses, shawls, and delicate muslins—were partially scattered on the deck, and speedily kicked on one side by one to be gathered up by another and thrust higgledy-piggledy, like a bundle of rags, back into their dilapidated receptacle, and trodden down to make them lie closer, while their owner looked helplessly and piteously on from a distance. Philippa gave a sigh of relief that she was spared the sight of her own beautiful new box being similarly ill-used, it having been sent overnight. She clung to the hope that it had been more tenderly treated; at any rate, being brass-bound, she did not believe it could have burst open.

Passengers and luggage, however, were soon aboard, and the vessel steamed slowly from the shore.

The sea was as calm as a lake. It was the first time Philippa had ever been upon the water, and her heart bounded with a sense of ecstatic enjoyment as she drank in the salt sea breezes, and felt herself borne upon the buoyant, undulating waves. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes brightened, she seemed to be breathing in new life in a new world; her pulse beat and quickened with a pure animal pleasure of health and life. She could hardly believe in her own identity, that she was the same Philippa who had struggled so wearily and so drearily through the last few months of life till it seemed to her there was nothing worth living for except the love of this man who was by her side now, which had seemed then an uncertain thing and

beyond her reach. Now she grasped it, his love was assured to her, their two lives were merged in one, he was hers for all the days to come. Again and again the solemn words "till death us do part," which he had spoken with his brave strong voice, echoed in her ears. How everything was changed—changed, too, so suddenly—she most of all. Her old self seemed to have disappeared, and a new to have been created that bore but a dim, shadowy resemblance to the old.

She and Jasper walked up and down the deck of the steamer, silent, too happy to talk; it was enough at present to enjoy, oblivious of all things but the blue skies above and the living world of waters rolling and swelling around and below them. Here and there they caught sight of a vessel with every inch of canvas spread, gliding slow and ghostlike over the smooth waters,

while the grey sea-gulls in large flights swept though the air and darted down into the waves to snatch their prey.

"Is it a dream Jasper, *is* it a dream?" exclaimed Philippa, lifting her happy face to his. A smile and a gentle pressure of the hand answered her, and they continued their march up and down till Jasper stopped and said—

"Do you see the land-line yonder?" She shaded her eyes and peered in the direction he pointed out, and at last admitted she did see it.

"That's Boulogne," he said; "in about an hour we shall be there."

"Oh! I am so sorry!" exclaimed Philippa. "I should like to spend half my life going backwards and forwards on this dear boat from Folkestone to Boulogne."

"We've had luck on our side to-day,"

replied Jasper ; “ it is a beastly passage as a rule. I’ve been over dozens of times, and if you were to ask me when I had spent the most wretched hours of my life, I should say ‘ on board the Boulogne steamer.’ ”

“ To tell you the truth,” rejoined Philippa, confidingly, “ I really dreaded this delightful journey across the channel ; it would have been so terrible, so undignified, to be sea-sick on one’s wedding day, wouldn’t it ? ”

“ It would be the reverse of pleasant, I confess, Queenie,” he answered ; “ so we will consider the ‘ undignified ’ proceeding postponed sine die.”

They stood watching as they approached the shore nearer and nearer, till the vessel steamed into the harbour. The jetty was crowded with gaily-dressed people, some lounging idly about, others waiting expect-

tantly, and anxious eyes scanned the faces of those on deck, those on board scanned the faces of those on shore, all eagerly searching for friends or relations. A simultaneous and mutual recognition seemed to take place among the mass; hats, hands, and handkerchiefs were waved, and a volley of bright smiles lighted up the long line of watchful faces as their friends struggled along the gangway, up the narrow stairs, and once more stood on terra firma, where the grave, stolid, though always courteous sergents de ville formed a prominent feature in the bustling scene, and made Philippa at once feel that she was in a foreign land. There was such a sea of happy faces undulating round her, such a confusion of tongues, such hand-shaking, chattering, and friendly greetings, that she felt quite bewildered, and yet a little sorry to get out of it, as

Jasper at once hailed a fiacre, and having seated her and himself therein, drove direct to the station. They had no troublesome business to look after, and in less than a quarter of an hour they were rattling away en route to Paris.





CHAPTER III.

OUT OF SMALL THINGS COMETH GREAT.

DO we, any of us, ever forget our impression on first entering Paris, that queen of cities, which comes nearer to our ideas of an enchanted land than any other our eyes have ever seen, or in all probability will ever see in the civilized world. On first leaving the station Philippa glanced curiously round and thought it was rather a dull place, and not so very unlike our own "Old Smoky;" but in the course of a few minutes they turned suddenly into one of the wide Boulevards, with its long vista of lights and trees and elegantly

arranged shops brilliantly illuminated, the cafés thrown open to the street like a house turned inside out, lined with looking-glasses and decorated with shrubs and flowers, the gay throngs of people seated at little round tables in front, taking ices, drinking coffee, and smoking in a state of social, if not convivial companionship, while hurrying or lounging crowds were passing to and fro upon the pavement, like a living panorama, filling the air with a pleasant hum of life and rippling waves of laughter; then the vehicles of different kinds, from the low social victoria to the huge omnibuses, some crawling lazily along, others rolling with reckless speed over the asphalt roadway, each and all carrying their lights of varying colours—green, blue, red, white, or yellow—flashing about in all directions like brilliant fireflies through the twilight atmosphere of an enchanted land. The large full moon

looked down from the silent skies, and her serene light came down and added the glory of heaven to the evanescent and luxurious aspect of the earth.

Of course in all this there was nothing new to Jasper Brantynham; he had struggled through many months of his life amid the gaieties of Paris, till he had grown blasé and weary of them; but to Philippa all was strange, new, and beautiful. She could scarcely speak for the wonder of it; she sat with her husband's hand tightly clasped in hers, looking round with flushed excited face, sometimes silent, sometimes uttering her thoughts aloud, but feeling so much more than she could speak; words seem always weak when our feelings are strong.

They put up at the Grand Hotel and remained a week in Paris, during which time they worked harder than many work

for their bread; seeing all that was to be seen, enjoying all that was to be enjoyed. During the day they toured about the city, sometimes inspecting the public buildings, sometimes strolling up and down the Boulevards or round the Palais Royal, looking at the shops till their eyes and their feet were weary; then perhaps they wandered through the splendid galleries of the Louvre, examining and admiring the pictures and works of art contained therein. Philippa's artistic eye and intellectual soul revelled in these things as in one continual feast; her powers of appreciation seemed to grow day by day. In the evening they generally drove slowly through the illuminated Champs Elysées, catching snatches of music, and sometimes of slightly unmusical vocalization, that floated from the cafés chantants out into the open air. Jasper's chief enjoyment was

the pleasure these things afforded Philippa; to her it was a rapturous week, one to be marked with a white stone on her life's tablet; it was worth while to have been born and lived, if only for this one week's fulness of joy.

It was their last day in Paris; the next they were to start on their homeward route, intending, however, to go to Fontainebleau, remaining a couple of days there to look over that palace of many memories and stroll beneath the patriarchal trees of that noble forest. They were taking a last look round on that queen of cities; they had already sauntered through the Place de la Concorde, and sat down to rest beneath the wide-spreading beeches in the garden of the Tuileries. They had not however been there many minutes, watching the gay chattering throng pass and re-pass them, when a tall fair-bearded man of

the true unmistakeable British breed came with a slow solemn march down the wide avenue, smoking in a slow serious fashion, as though that was the chief business of his life; now and then casting his eye carelessly over the crowd. Not looking as if he was enjoying himself in the least, he seemed like a man who was enduring life, being quite superior to the idea of making it an amusing affair. His eye at last fell on Jasper Brantynham; it lighted up with a gleam of recognition, he quickened his pace, and came towards the spot where Jasper and Philippa were seated. A shade of annoyance crossed Jasper's face as he observed him approaching, but it cleared off as he held out his hand, saying—

“Why, Brantynham, old fellow, this is the last place in the world where I should have expected to meet *you*. What on earth are you doing in Paris these dog-days?” As


he spoke he cast a scrutinizing glance on Philippa's face. Jasper observed it, and answered it, saying, "My wife, Mrs. Brantynham, Colonel Vane," introducing them formally to each other. Colonel Vane raised his hat in the most approved military fashion, and "was very happy to make Mrs. Brantynham's acquaintance;" and Mrs. Brantynham bowed and smiled, and looked as though she was in no way displeased at making his.

"We have come here with a purpose," continued Jasper, and a half smile curled his beardless lips; "but you, who express so much surprise at meeting *us*, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, I'm suffering from a fit of good nature. It is not often I have an attack; but I came so far to start Edie and the governor en route for Switzerland. They left last night by the mail train for Geneva. After 'doing'

a bit of cockney mountaineering, they mean to work their way slowly to Rome and spend the winter there."

They walked on chattering pleasantly under the bright summer skies, giving and receiving news of mutual friends whose names were all strange to Philippa. Colonel Vane prided himself on being a first-rate judge of two things, a "horse" and a "woman," and though he walked by Jasper's side, he kept bending his head forward to catch a glimpse of the beautiful face on the other side. Presently, taking advantage of some low-voiced remark of Philippa's, he dropped back and came to her side, and addressed the rest of his conversation chiefly to her. When they reached the hotel, Jasper invited him to dine with them that evening at seven o'clock. Colonel Vane was sorry, very sorry, he could not do so, as he would himself be entertaining a



party of bachelor friends at the Louvre, where he was staying.

"By-the-bye," he added, "they are nearly all mutual acquaintances of ours; there's Captain Banks—you remember him; he's lately exchanged into the Guards—and Fred Mavor and Archie Dundas, who's just home from Egypt, and two or three other capital fellows who I think you'd like to meet."

"Thanks," answered Jasper, "but I don't think I can come." His tone was slightly irresolute, as though he did not like to accept the invitation, as his acceptance would leave Philippa alone for the evening. She had tact enough to see exactly how it was with him and came to the rescue, and gave him a verbal push in the direction he was inclined to go.

"You have been in attendance on me every hour for the last week," she said, "and I think out of mere gratitude I might

spare you for one evening. Do go, Jasper; indeed I shall be really glad to be rid of you. I have got to see about the packing, as we start early in the morning, and I shall leave you alone for the greater part of the evening."

It needs very little persuasion to make us indulge our own inclinations. Jasper half accepted, and it was arranged that a cover was to be laid for him, and if he did not put in an appearance he was to be forgiven. Colonel Vane made some complimentary speech to Philippa about her "not having the inhumanity to sever her husband from all his old ties because he had made a new one, as many foolish women did." He let his eyes rest upon her face with a sort of fascinated admiration as he took her hand to say "Good-bye." He spoke slowly, and expressed a hope that they might all meet in the morning and have a

chat before starting, and then let fall her hand as though he did not like to let it go. Indeed the intensity of his gaze had been rather embarrassing to Philippa; she felt her colour slowly rising as he said "Good-bye" a second time and turned away.

If Colonel Vane had uttered his thoughts aloud, as he went slowly up the street, they would have run something in this fashion: "Brantynham's had a stroke of luck and he deserves it; she's a magnificent creature. Odd! I was down at Brantynham ten days ago, and never heard a word that Jasper was married or likely to be. I wonder who she was? I never saw her face before. By Jove! if I had I shouldn't have forgotten it in a hurry."

"How Vane stared at you, Queenie," were Jasper's first words as they entered their apartments. "I was half inclined to quarrel with him; he looked as though he had never

seen a beautiful woman before, and was never likely to see one again."

Philippa liked to hear her husband call her "beautiful;" her beauty was worth something since it pleased him. She glanced shyly into her dressing-glass to see how she was looking.

"He is the first friend of yours I've seen, I hope he liked me," she said.

"Liked you!" repeated Jasper, with an emphasis as though *liking* was a very poor word to express the impression she must make on anybody. "Umph, I should think he did! But it don't much matter whether he liked you or not, darling; you are not likely to see him again in a hurry."

"No?" said Philippa, inquiringly. "I'm sorry for that; he looks like a man one might soon get friends with."

"Ah, that's just it; there's something dangerously insinuating about him, even

before he opens his lips," rejoined Jasper; "he is exactly the sort of man I should not choose my wife to get friends with."

"Why! is he a bad man?" asked Philippa.

"Oh, no!" returned Jasper; "he is a good fellow enough in his way, but he is not exactly the sort of article fitted for a lady's companion." Philippa leaned her cheek upon her hand and looked at him curiously.

After a moment's pause, she added—

"Jasper, dear, do you know what I am thinking of?"

"Hardly," he answered; "though as a rule I'm not a bad hand at detecting motives when I have the action to guide me. But I cannot fathom a lady's thoughts without the help of her tongue."

"That does not say much for masculine penetration," replied Philippa. "I think

I can guess yours without much trouble when you are thinking 'you'd like to join Colonei Vane and his merry party, but you're afraid poor Philippa will be dull without you;' which is quite wrong, for she'll be most unflatteringly happy without you."

"You are a witch, Queenie, for that's precisely what I was thinking," replied Jasper. "And now that you have expounded my thoughts, perhaps you will be good enough to expound your own, which I am sure will be interesting to me."

"Well," she answered, "I was thinking that I should like to know the history of all your male friends."

"*All!*" exclaimed Jasper; "what an insatiable appetite! You're afflicted with a terrible thirst for knowledge, and if any of my friends should be insane enough to write his autobiography you shall have a copy,

but I don't think you will find it an improving study."

"I should like to make a favourable impression on all your friends, Jasper—good, bad, or indifferent—simply because they are your friends, and for no other reason; but I must say I am especially anxious for your father to like me. Shall I see him soon?"

"I hope so, dear," answered Jasper, "though he is rather a cantankerous party to deal with."

"And, by-the-bye," rejoined Philippa, following a sudden thought, "what are we going to do when we return to London? You know we've nowhere to go to; we have talked the matter over, but you have never decided on what you really intend to do."

"Well," he answered, deliberately, "I think we'll stay a few days at the Langham Hotel, while we look about us. We can't

think of going regularly into housekeeping just yet; there are plenty of good and elegant apartments to be found in London, and we must be content with some such way of living for the present."

"Content!" repeated Philippa, "I think it will be delightful."

"When I have settled you comfortably," he continued, "with your piano and all your things about you——"

"Not forgetting papa," rejoined Philippa.

"Certainly not," continued Jasper; "our home will be his so long as he pleases to make it so. Well, having settled you comfortably, I think I shall run down to Brantynham to see how the land lies."

"I hope your father will not be very angry with you for marrying *me*," exclaimed Philippa, lifting her great grey eyes earnestly to his face.

"He'll forgive me the moment he sees

you," said Jasper, fondly and proudly, "and he'll say it is the wisest thing I have done in all my life."

At seven o'clock precisely that evening Jasper Brantynham joined the social circle which Colonel Vane had gathered round him at the Hotel du Louvre. Some of the men he met he had not seen for years, others had been his club companions during the last few months, but not one of them had heard even the remotest rumour either of his engagement or his marriage. He had to run the gauntlet of much quizzing and banter on the subject. He bore it all and answered it in the like spirit, with good-humoured equanimity, though at the same time he showed plainly that he did not intend to enlighten them upon the subject. Colonel Vane had evidently roused the general curiosity by his report of the lady, who, he declared, had

taken him captive by a single glance. In a very neatly-turned speech after dinner Colonel Vane proposed the health of Mrs. Brantynham, which was duly honoured. This was done greatly to Jasper's vexation; he would much rather the name of Mrs. Brantynham had been let alone, though of course the toast was proposed with friendly intentions out of compliment to him. However, on the whole he had a pleasant evening, and they parted, not much before midnight, with the hope of soon meeting on the other side of the water. For a time they were going to scatter themselves far and wide in search of pleasure.

The next day Jasper and Philippa went to Fontainebleau, and spent a few glorious, never-to-be-forgotten days rambling over the quaint old palace, taking, indeed, but a cursory view of the works of art and treasures of beauty which are still to be found

there. The place itself delighted Philippa; she liked to wander through the deserted rooms where the footsteps of kings and emperors had echoed in the old days that even now are not so far off. She breathed quickly and a feeling of awe came over her as she stood on the threshold of Marie Antoinette's apartments. With her imaginative mind's eye she saw the beautiful Austrian queen in it there in all the pomp of her royal youth and beauty, and a companion picture rose up beside it—a faded, grief-worn woman, grey-haired and hollow-eyed, bending her graceful neck beneath the guillotine; a cruel sacrifice demanded in atonement for the sins of past generations.

Some historical associations clung to the walls, glanced in from the formal gardens (once filled with courtly gatherings, now deserted), and impregnated the very air she breathed with a sort of melancholy that

was subduing but not sad. Thence they strolled into the forest, with its many picturesque views of ravines, rocks, and valleys, and the grand old trees that had stood there for centuries, and had seen so much and kept the secrets of generations of men; in vain the wandering wind stirred the leaves or shook the branches with wild, ungovernable fury—they were mute still, always mute, and answered nothing. However, the pleasant holiday—that one holiday feast in Philippa's life—was past, no longer a thing to be enjoyed, but already enrolled among the treasures of the past.

They returned to London, and speedily settled themselves in a suite of handsome apartments in Albemarle Street, Mr. Maitland being nothing loth to accept their invitation and join them there; but he was anxious that the rooms which he had at one time so much despised in Great Mary-

lebone Street should be kept on for a time, in case he might feel a desire to return there. He was not quite sure his daughter's new way of life would suit him, and he would like to have a place of his own to retire to, if it should so please him. Some facetious allusion he made paralleling himself with King Lear, who gave up all for his daughters' sake—forgetting that the poor foolish King gave up his crown and all his possessions, while he himself gave only his poverty, his cares, and troubles; these his daughter took with one hand, and gave him plenty, peace, and love with the other.

But Mr. Maitland really seemed to think he was conferring a great favour on Mr. Brantynham by taking up his quarters in Philippa's home. He appeared to be quite oblivious of the fact that hitherto he had chiefly owed his support to the labour of his daughter's hands, and must now depend

wholly on Jasper Brantynham's friendship. With all her blind affection and devotion to her father, Philippa was uncomfortably conscious of a certain thanklessness in her father's general behaviour. He was ready to take all good things from any outstretched hand as a matter of right, a tribute showered down upon him in sympathy for his misfortunes, but he gave no thanks in return, or if his lips feebly uttered them his heart was dumb.

Jasper of course saw much that Philippa was blind to, but he was content so that she was happy. He rejoiced to hear Mr. Maitland suggest a possibility that he might prefer a home of his own, and left it to time to work the change he most desired in his domestic arrangements. He had promised Philippa *he* would never separate her from her father, and at any cost he would keep his word.

As soon as the old man was settled there and Philippa said it looked like home, Jasper Brantynham left them and went down to Brantynham Hall, intending to remain there only a few days, and Philippa awaited in great anxiety the result of his visit.





CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT.

JASPER BRANTYNHAM approached his ancestral home in great perplexity of mind ; he wished to let his father know the fact of his marriage, but he dreaded the telling of it. The one flaw in his father's character was family pride, to which he clung with the obstinacy characteristic of his race. He had always been anxious for his son to marry ; but he specified that the lady should be of position and well connected, that she might add to and not detract from the family importance. Jasper's thought of Philippa was,

what a noble character she is! how beautiful and pure and good! an ornament to any station, a grace to any name! But would the old man see with his eyes? No, he would see in her only the daughter of a ruined speculator, all the worse for her beauty, which he would regard as the snare that had allured his son.

Jasper knew it would be no use to keep silent upon the subject of Mr. Maitland's position and affairs, as some of those good-natured people with whom the world abounds would be sure to discover, distort, and make known what he most desired to conceal; so he made up his mind to tell his father the whole entire truth, and of course to make it as palatable as he could. It would be a bitter pill to swallow at the best, however much he gilded it with rhetoric and reason. If it came to the worst he would plead "extenuating circumstances," as

greater criminals than he plead every day and with success.

As he passed through the village on his way to Brantynham Hall, he overtook Dr. Latham returning from his morning round. He knew the Doctor was in constant attendance on his father; nothing could have been more opportune than this meeting. They shook hands and greeted each other with genial heartiness.

"You must come home to lunch with me," said the Doctor. "I am going to pay your father a visit this afternoon, and I will drive you over to Brantynham."

Jasper gladly availed himself of this kind offer, as it would afford him an opportunity of talking over the subject of his father's health without the formality of professional inquiries. Of course he inquired after him in a casual sort of way as they drove along, and learned that he was much the same as

“Don’t give him credit for more virtue than he deserves,” rejoined her husband, good-humouredly; “I don’t believe he would have dreamed of coming here if I hadn’t invited him. I’ve promised him some luncheon too, and let him be served quickly, will you? I’ve a long round this afternoon, and I must leave here in one hour and a quarter at latest; then I’m going to drive Jasper home.” The Doctor passed into his study, Mrs. Latham ordered the mid-day meal to be served immediately, then addressed Mr. Brantynham again, saying—

“Ah! well, though I owe your visit to chance, I’m not going to scold you now you are here, though I dare say you are in a hurry to get away.” He was about to protest to the contrary, but was not allowed to get through half a sentence, for Mrs. Latham nodded mysteriously, adding—

"It is all very well for you to pretend you don't know who I mean," continued Mrs. Latham. "I name no names, there's no occasion to do it; but if you don't look sharp, somebody else will step forward and carry off the prize."

"What is the prize to be?" asked Jasper, "and for what is it to be given? I'm game to enter into competition, whether for shooting, riding, rowing, or——"

"It's no use to play innocence with *me*," interrupted Mrs. Latham, as though all the penetrating wisdom of the entire sex was concentrated in her breast, "when a pretty girl is ready to throw herself into a man's arms, you'll never make me believe he is not fully aware of the fact."

"I assure you," said Jasper, gravely, "no pretty girl has ever manifested such an insane inclination towards me; if she did, I'm by no means sure I should have

the courage to repel so pleasant an attack."

"I don't want to pry into anybody's secrets, Jasper," said Mrs. Latham, a little impatiently, "but we are such old friends, I think you might confide in *me*. You might as well, for I know all about it. Mrs. Brantynham was here on Sunday, and we had a long conversation."

"My dear Mrs. Latham, pray excuse my interrupting you," exclaimed Jasper, "but I don't think that any conversation Mrs. Brantynham would be likely to enjoy, could be of the slightest interest to me."

"I know you are not good friends," rejoined Mrs. Latham, deprecatingly, "and perhaps that is not so very surprising, considering your relationship to each other; but I don't think you ought to allow your prejudices to interfere when not only your own happiness is concerned, but that of

another, and that other so devoted. I am sure, however much your dear father might object now, in the end he would be sure to give way, and——”

“ You speak in enigmas,” said Jasper, interrupting her, “ for which I do not attempt to find a solution ; some false report concerning me has evidently reached you, and I beg you, dear Mrs. Latham, to contradict, not to circulate it, for, believe me on my honour, there is not a grain of truth in it.”

Mrs. Latham laid her finger on her lips as her husband entered the room, and they immediately sat down to luncheon, during which time Jasper directed the discourse to the affairs at Brantynham Hall. The Doctor was very cautious in what he said, and left many things to be inferred ; he, however, led Jasper to understand that Joseph Atherton was getting more unpopular every day, and the cry of the

tenantry and the people employed on the estate was getting louder and louder for the young master's return. Though the reason of his remaining so almost entirely away from his ancestral home was pretty well understood, still there were some few opinions that clashed even upon that subject; in one small circle it was whispered that he stayed away from love, a non-reciprocal passion for Kate; in another it was freely circulated that he was kept away by hatred of the other members of her family, who had made their home at Brantynham Hall.

Jasper listened as the Doctor talked, and answered in brief phrases or in briefer monosyllables. While the conversation related to the Athertons or Mrs. Brantynham his tongue was tied; he could not speak ill or with slight respect of his father's wife. As soon as he could do so without seeming

abrupt he shifted the conversation, and talking of his father asked Doctor Latham point blank what was his real opinion of his father's state both of mind and body.

"I want to know," he said, "not only the evil that exists, but the probability of what may follow hereafter ; whether he can now, or will at any future time, be able to discuss matters freely without falling into that passionate excitement which has been so alarming. To tell you the truth, Doctor," he added, "and I like to be frank with you, I want to consult my father—indeed I have come down for that express purpose—on a matter which I know will not be pleasant to him."

"Then don't speak to him on the subject at all," said the Doctor, gravely ; "I will not be answerable for the effect any excitement may have upon him. It is with the greatest difficulty and constant attention I have

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been able to ward off another attack which has once or twice threatened him. At any hour or any moment any unpleasant communication might bring on a relapse, from which he would never recover. I've had great difficulty to pull him through so far, Jasper. No, don't speak to him of anything likely to vex him. If the matter you refer to is one that needs legal interference, consult your lawyer; if it is anything in which I can assist or advise you, consult me." Jasper wrung his hand, saying that "when-ever he wanted a friend he always knew where to find one." Luncheon being finished, the carriage was brought round and they drove through the green winding lanes to Brantynham Hall.

"You quite understand me," Dr. Latham once said by the way; "your father is at times as shrewd or shrewder than ever, and as capable of transacting business. Occasion-

ally his mind seems to wander, and at times fails him utterly. Mrs. Brantynham no doubt means all that is kind, but I think she troubles him about trifles; thus his irritation gets unbearable and I am sent for to undo the evil she has done. But here we are, and if I am not mistaken there is your father in his chair, drawn up under the trees yonder to the right. Do you see him?"

Yes, Jasper did see him; there he was in his old favourite place beneath the lime-trees, whence he gained a view of his possessions for miles round; the pine wood he had planted so many years ago making a prominent feature in the landscape. Instead of driving up the broad walk of the house, Jasper and Doctor Latham alighted, and made their way through a side gate and by a winding path to the place where the old man was seated, with his toothless hound at his feet. He seemed surprised,

and perhaps not overjoyed, as he observed the two approaching together. He shook hands with his son and glanced suspiciously at the Doctor, saying—

“There was no need to send for Jasper, wasting his time and putting him to useless expense. I’m not dead yet,” he added, grimly; “I’m quite well—quite well. I never was better in my life than I am to-day.”

“That’s true indeed,” rejoined Doctor Latham; “you are better now than I have seen you for many a day; if you go on like this I shan’t despair of seeing you ride to hounds again. Don’t look so suspiciously at me, old friend,” he added. “I did not send for Jasper; I picked him up on the way and drove him here, that’s all.”

“Good, good,” replied Mr. Brantynham, with a satisfied nod; “and I’m glad to see my son, always glad to see him;” he shook

hands with him again; "but I'm not a child, and if I'm bad or in danger I should like to be told so to my face. I am Christian enough to bear the truth, but I don't like the telegraph to be working behind my back," he added, testily. Doctor Latham assured him that, having full reliance on his strength of mind, he would always deal openly and frankly with him.

After a little genial conversation he took his leave and continued his round. Jasper threw himself on the grass and began caressing the old man's hound, making as he did so some commonplace remark about the weather, adding: "And I am glad to see you are able to be out here enjoying the sunshine, father." Instead of making any response, the old man bent forward and peered anxiously into his face, saying—

"Is there anything wrong in town, Jasper? I know you are not fond of Bran-

tynham Hall, and very seldom come down unexpectedly unless you've got a reason."

"What a satire on my filial conduct!" exclaimed Jasper, forcing a laugh. "Is not the pleasure of seeing you reason enough; though, by-the-bye, I think I never enjoyed a drive through the Brantynham lanes so much. The country is looking beautiful, and the first autumn tints falling on the green leaves far and near gives a finishing touch and make the scene glorious."

"Yes, it is a fine prospect," said the old man, looking admiringly round him. "I am wheeled here every evening to watch the sun go down. We have had some wonderful sunsets lately. I shall come up one day to watch it for the last time."

"You may grow tired even of the sunset before that time comes," said Jasper, with a touch of masculine tenderness in his tone. "There must be a 'last time' for everything,

and I hope your last time is a long way off yet."

"Ay, ay! my dear boy, I believe you; but some heirs thirst for their inheritance, and grudge the life that stands between them and it."

"Don't let such thoughts come into your mind," said Jasper; "think of me as your son, forget I am your heir. I would rather be a landless beggar than you should think of me as you seem to do! Every time I come to Brantynham Hall you eye me with suspicion, as though you thought I had come to watch your—your strength decay."

"No, no! not exactly that," he answered; "but it is very natural. Joe thinks you will not marry till you can bring a wife home to be the mistress of Brantynham. You can't do that while I live; not while I live."

"Joe lies in that, as in many other

things," replied Jasper; "there is nothing in the world would give me greater pleasure than that you should open your arms to receive a wife of mine."

"I will—I will," replied his father, eagerly laying his hand upon his arm, "but it must be a wife of my approving, mind that. I want to protect you from unscrupulous people. No designing woman must scheme for you; no nameless stranger be brought home to Brantynham."

Jasper thought this would be a good time to speak; to feel his way cautiously.

"I am glad you have broached the subject of my marriage again, father," he said, "for it is one on which I wish to speak to you. You are anxious for me to marry, and I—well, at last I have chosen a wife." He smiled pleasantly, but as he looked up at his father he regretted having spoken. A livid pallor overspread the old man's

face; his white lips trembled, as though a sudden gust of passion was sweeping over them, as he gasped forth the one word—

“Married!”

Impelled by momentary alarm, and remembering the Doctor’s instructions, Jasper hastened to say—

“No, no! I never said married; only I—you hear me—I have seen the one woman I could love, father; and if—if you could see her, I know you would be as anxious to have her for a daughter as I am to have her for my wife.”

While his son was speaking the old man murmured, half to himself—

“Not married, that’s well! Jasper, I never would have forgiven a clandestine step in that direction. For generations past we have been proud to take our wives in the face of the whole world, and bring them home here with all honour and open

rejoicings. There has been no sneaking through backways to our fireside, Jasper; women are cunning, and you are well worth scheming for, my boy. But tell me all about it; what is she? who is she? will the connexion be useful to you in a diplomatic or parliamentary way? These things should always be thought of before a man commits himself, or—— Hush! here's Joe."

And as he spoke Jasper looked up and saw Joe slouching along the path. They nodded to each other, but did not go through the friendly ceremony of shaking hands; in their case it would have been a useless formality.

"It's about time to get you to the house," Joe said, laying his hand on the back of Mr. Brantynham's chair and preparing to wheel him homeward. Glancing at Jasper, he added, "It's a pleasant surprise

seeing you here to-day, though you generally give us warning when you're coming."

"I do when I think it's necessary," he answered; "but I don't think my father needs any special preparation before seeing me, and I suppose *you* are not afraid of being caught napping."

Although Jasper spoke in his usual tone, and even smiled as he was speaking, there was no disguising the fact that he regarded Joe's probity with suspicion and his intellect with contempt. But it was not convenient for Joe to quarrel with Jasper; so, without seeming to notice either his tone or manner, he answered him—

"There's no time for napping on this estate of Brantynham. I'm obliged to keep wide awake all the year round, and I believe I sleep with one eye open. There's a great deal to think of and arrange, and mine is an

awkward position here; in a sort of way I belong to the family, yet I am neither treated nor trusted as one—by the tenantry and farmers, I mean,” he added, quickly. “I believe I have your father’s confidence and yours”—Jasper knew he did not believe anything of the kind, but for common good breeding’s sake he could not contradict him; he smiled, and Joe continued—“they watch me suspiciously, and carp and quibble over everything; then they will appeal to your father, and though he is always on my side it is not agreeable to have every action spied upon and questioned. There’s Farmer Jackson, the worst word in his mouth is too good for me.”

“Ay, you were on the wrong side of the hedge in that little affair of his,” said Jasper, interrupting his flow of speech.

“The wrong side for him, but the right side for you,” answered Joe. “That’s the

worst of it; while endeavouring to do the best for the estate, one seems like an enemy to those who live upon it. They are always throwing your name in my teeth, muttering and speculating on 'what Mr. Jasper would do if he had the handling of affairs,' and so forth."

Jasper could not help acknowledging to himself that Joe's position was not a pleasant one. Looking at it in the light he put it, things were rather "rough upon him." He was evidently regarded as an intruder and usurper. From the first hour of Mrs. Brantynham's appearance the people about the place had mutely resented her installation as mistress of the Hall, and when her son was set over them they rebelled stoutly against his authority, and questioned his motives as well as his actions. There could be no denying that Joe's was an unpleasant position, and Jasper mentally admitted the

fact and answered him with more cordiality than usual.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we are indebted to you for doing a good deal of work and bearing a great deal of abuse ; we shall pay off our debts some day. Meanwhile, Joe, if you walk in the straightforward, honest path you will be sure to be right in the end."

"Ay," replied Joe, "it sounds very well talking ; but that same honest path is sometimes a thorny one for miles and miles, and there's not much to be got at the end of it. By-the-bye," he added, bending over Mr. Brantynham's chair, "have you told Jasper about the timber in the Long Meadow?"

"No," he answered, sharply, "there is no need. I am master of the place still."

"True," replied Joe, "but we have no right to cut down the wood without the consent of the heir."

These words were quite enough to set the old man's jealous feelings on fire. Jasper was uncharitable enough to fancy they were uttered for that purpose, and, being anxious that at that special moment no unpleasant thought should rise between them, hastened to say—

“Whatever my father desires is right Joe; let his orders be obeyed, whatever they are. There is no need to consult me on any matter concerning the estate. My father is quite able to conduct his own affairs.”

“You are a good son,” Mr. Brantynhan answered, “a very good son; I always said so. You see there was no necessity for your obstinacy, Joe.” Again addressing Jasper, he added, “I want a clearing made down in the Long Meadow. I drove round there last week and marked the spot; but he says,” jerking his head towards Joe

"I have no right—no right to cut down my own trees without consulting *you!*"

"I spoke according to the law," answered Joe, "and Jasper knows that I am right. If anything went wrong, I, as your adviser, should be held responsible, morally at least, and get all the blame."

Jasper could not help feeling that, as Joe truly said, "he had spoken according to the law." If he had been a hired steward acting between them he would have commended his caution; but being Joe, and regarding the position he held respecting the family, Jasper felt he had been making a sneaking attempt to widen the breach that already existed spiritually between his father and himself, though according to words and actions the most cordial relationship existed between them. At least nothing was seen that warranted an adverse opinion. The old man was always

jealous of his authority, growing more so every year, and sensitive as to his freedom of action in all things respecting the estate. Seeing he was getting excited on the subject, Jasper laid his hand upon his arm, saying—

“My dear father, keep calm; don’t let your feelings be ruffled on such a subject as this. Between us two there can be no law but your own will. Pray never think of consulting me; do exactly as you like, and rest assured, neither now nor hereafter, shall I ever question any act of yours.”

“You are either a born fool or you don’t know what you are saying,” whispered Joe; “you’ll expect me to keep things, and yet you put difficulties in the way.”

“I shall soon be here to look after things myself,” replied Jasper; “then you will be relieved from all responsibilities.”

Joe glanced at him with a quick incom-

prehensive look in his eyes; but there was no more talking, they had reached the house. Mrs. Brantynham and Kate Ather-ton came out in the open verandah to receive and welcome the unexpected visitor to his own home. Kate's glowing cheek and sparkling eyes, as she held out her hand to Jasper, told him that she at least was honestly glad to see him. They stood chatting there for a few minutes, then Jasper passed into the study with his father, and there they were closeted alone for nearly two hours. Once or twice Mrs. Brantynham tapped at the door, but was denied admittance; but she did not seem to take the denial in good earnest, for it was some minutes before Jasper heard her trailing skirts as she rustled away.

At seven o'clock the dinner-bell rang and Mr. Brantynham and his son joined the family circle, appearing to be on the best

possible terms with each other. As Dr. Latham truly said, it was one of Mr. Brantynham's best days; even the servants who waited observed to one another in what unusually good health and spirits their master seemed to be. When the cloth was cleared and the dessert only remained upon the table, Mr. Brantynham ordered some special Madeira, his favourite wine, in which he rarely indulged, to be brought up.

"It has been in the cellar ever since you were born, Jasper," he said; "and I don't think we can broach a bottle on a fitter occasion than this."

Mrs. Brantynham heard his order with amazement, knowing he was specially choice over this particular wine, and wondering at his generosity on this "occasion," which he specified so emphatically. What was it? Merely a visit of a son to his father, a

common occurrence enough surely, and certainly not worthy of such special honour. She said nothing, but only watched and waited.

Joe made some facetious remark ; the old man nodded quietly, as though enjoying the thought of the surprise he was going to give them. The wine was brought, he filled his glass, passed the bottle, and desired the rest of the small party to fill theirs. Then smiling sagaciously he added—

“I wish to drink, and please all join me, to the health of my son’s bride that is to be.”

His words fell like a bombshell among the trio. Mrs. Brantynham griped her glass as though she would crush it ; a deadly pallor overspread her face, her eyes gleamed, though her lips smiled as she repeated the words—

“To Jasper’s bride that is to be;” adding

"I did not know you had thrown the handkerchief and chosen her."

"I have not thrown the handkerchief," he said, "but I have chosen my wife." Joe turned livid; he and his mother exchanged glances as he repeated her first few words. The soft blush deepened on Kate's face; she glided round to the back of Jasper's chair and dropped a slight sisterly kiss on his forehead, saying—

"I wish you all joy, Jasper." As her lips touched the glass she added, "To your bride that is to be—God bless her!"

"Thanks, Kate, for your good wish," he answered, as he clasped her small hand cordially, "for I know you mean it."

"But now having raised our curiosity so far, you must not cut off all further communication," exclaimed Mrs. Brantynham. "Come, we wont catechize you in due order, we shall rely on your good nature to tell



CHAPTER V.

CAN WRONG BE RIGHT?

THE next day Jasper was whirled back to town in a state of extreme perplexity. He had gone down to Brantynham fully resolved to make a clean breast and acquaint his father with his marriage and all the circumstances attending it; but the best intentions are often frustrated by a chance look, a chance word, or the sudden uprising of a solitary thought. Doctor Latham's report of his father's health, and the stress he laid upon the necessity of his avoiding all annoying or exciting subjects, had slightly discomposed Jasper, and he felt inclined to

hesitate before he acted in direct opposition to the Doctor's advice and made his intended important communication; one so calculated to rouse irritable and angry feelings, which might have a disastrous effect upon a man of Mr. Brantynham's age and precarious state of health, before his son had time to smooth him down and reconcile him to the fact. When they drove to Brantynham, and found the old man sitting in the sunshine seeming so much stronger and better in all ways, he hesitated no longer, but was once more resolved. Chance directed the conversation into the very channel where he most desired it should go. The disclosure was on his lips, but the look that sprang into his father's face frightened him and drove it back, and his lips denied, equivocated, and dallied with the truth he longed to utter, yet dared not! Now what a predicament he

was in! He had to a certain extent confided in his father and paved the way to the grand climax, so far as to tell him he was engaged to a lady named Philippa Maitland, the only daughter of a gentleman who was in an enfeebled and delicate state of health, and was thus in a great measure prevented from doing the duties incumbent upon him as the natural guardian of his one beautiful and accomplished child. So much indeed he was obliged to state, as after a slight struggle the old man had desired that Mr. and Miss Maitland should be forthwith invited to pay a visit to Brantynham Hall. That this should be Jasper knew was impossible, as Mr. Maitland was not to be trusted in an affair that required both delicacy and prudence to prevent an explosion; he would be sure to be doing or saying something that would be better undone or unsaid. No, Mr. Maitland must

not come to Brantynham Hall. Then he thought of Philippa; he had promised to escort her down in a day or two. How was that to be managed? What could he say to her? Should he attempt to persuade her that wrong was right? He knew it would be absurd to think of such a thing with any chance of success. Even if he could stoop to do it, she was too clear-sighted and right-minded to see things in a false light. He must explain matters thoroughly to her; there must be no half-measures where she was concerned. He would let her know exactly and under what pressure of circumstances he had acted as he had done. Loving her own father as devotedly as she did, she would be better able to comprehend his conduct in regard to his own. He had himself known of more than one case where instant death had followed upon great excitement; it was that he feared,

especially as the Doctor had warned him to be careful. He made up his mind that he would not attempt to disguise the wrong, but would ask her to do it for his sake. His cheek burned, his whole soul revolted from what he was obliged to do, and he painted the fact to himself in the ugliest colours. He was going to ask a pure high-minded girl-bride to lay aside the wifhood she had scarcely worn a month, to assume her maiden name, and so present herself in a false character to her husband's father's eyes! It seemed a terrible thing to do, as he looked at it in that light! He would never have the courage to ask her to do it. For the first time he dreaded to look Philippa in the face. He was going back to her with a stain upon his conscience, and to tempt her to soil her soul with the same sin.

Then he thought he would get out of

the train at the next station, go back to Brantynham, and dare the worst. But if the worst should happen how would he bear it? He would regard himself for ever after as his father's murderer, for words and actions kill as well as naked swords. Again, even if all should be well and no ill effects ensued, how could he face his father, who had always relied upon him as the soul of truth and honour, and own that he had deceived him, that he had lied? Yes, that was the right word, "lied." No, he had not courage for that. Then there was Mrs. Brantynham, with Kate and Joe, to be thought of; the information given to one must be extended to the whole household, and Philippa, his proud, glorious Philippa, would be forced to come among them as the chief actor in a clandestine marriage! And he knew what the consequences of that would be, the sort of social martyrdom she

would have to endure. Women, at least such jealous, disappointed women as Mrs. Brantynham, are sometimes so cruel to one another, and wound with a caress and stab with a smiling word. No, that would never do. He would throw himself on Philippa's mercy and plead "extenuating circumstances."

Then he shifted his mental vision, and tried to regard things in a more worldly, careless way. He was not the first man who had married privately; some kept their secret for years. It might be taken as rather an innocent deception after all. Philippa would go down to Brantynham as Miss Maitland; his father, at first attracted, then fascinated by her presence, would soon learn to love her as his own child, and one day she would throw her arms round his neck and tell him she was his child indeed—his son's wife—and would be always a loving daughter to him. All would be well then;

for who could resist any tender pleading that fell from Philippa's lips.

If he had only been in that one instance brave and strong and true to himself, what present annoyance and vexations he might have avoided, what future undreamed of calamities he might have escaped. But if all people said and did exactly the right thing at the right time, we should make a heaven of our own on earth; the exciting complexities of the law would have an end, and Justice might throw away her scales and go to sleep upon her throne. Huge miseries flow from the follies of wise men; one step awry, one single deviation from the right path, leads many a true and good man into a veritable slough of despond, whence he escapes after many struggles, soiled, bruised, and wounded, in mind if not in body. But from evil there comes good, and out of much tribulation there groweth heart's ease.

It was almost dark when Jasper reached Albemarle Street. Mr. Maitland was out, and Philippa was just sitting down to her solitary dinner when he entered the room, and drove her almost wild with joy at his speedy and unexpected return.

“There is a story somewhere called ‘The Longest Day in Life,’” she said, embracing him for the twentieth time, “and I’m sure I’ve just passed mine. It seems to me that you have been away a month, and yet it is only two days since I bade you Good-bye. Oh, Jasper, I am so glad to welcome you back!” He returned her caresses as fondly as they were given, as he said—

“I shall be tempted to go away again if you make the coming home so delightful.” She withdrew herself coquettishly from his arms and pretended to be huffed.

“Very well,” she answered, “after that

abominable threat I'll try to be disagreeable."

"No, don't" he said; "it is always foolish to attempt anything when you have no chance of succeeding."

"Well, perhaps I'll forgive the threat, provided you never put it into execution," replied Philippa. Then, resting her eyes upon his face, she fancied a worn, haggard look had fallen over it, and added quickly, "But how thoughtless I am to run on like this, when I am sure you must be tired."

"And hungry too," he rejoined. "Give me some dinner, Queenie, and I'll give you my news."

"A good exchange," she answered, "though I shall care more for your news than you will care for my dinner."

In the course of two or three minutes they were seated at table, and having dined—not sumptuously, but on two or three simple

well-cooked dishes—the cloth was cleared and they were left alone, and Philippa nestled down by Jasper's side. He put his arm round her and drew her to him till her head rested on his breast; he felt he could not look into her eyes while he was speaking.

“Now, sir, open your budget,” she said, “and pour every scrap of news into my eager ears—they are wide open—and mind tell me everything you have said and done from the first moment you arrived at Brantynham. I shall not ask you any questions. Come, consider yourself wound up; begin to tick and go off.”

He did begin quietly and gravely, putting the matter in the best light he could. He told her all, at least all that occurred between his father and himself; dwelling very strongly on the sudden impulsive dread that had made him deny the marriage he had half confessed. He made her

thoroughly understand that their engagement was an accepted thing, that his father was most anxious to see her, and he had promised to take her down to Brantynham Hall at once. She listened to him in unbroken silence, never speaking to make an observation or interrupt him in the least degree. When he had finished she expressed not a word of censure or of blame to him, but after a moment's pause, lifting her grave earnest eyes to his, she said—

“I wish I had not persuaded you to go down; it is all my fault.”

“Your fault, darling!” he answered; “never let me hear you say that. The only fault is of my making; I ought to have had more courage, tact, and prudence. I am surprised at myself, for in all my life, and I have been placed in some trying situations, I have never blundered or acted

weakly, nay, so falsely, as I have acted now."

Woman-like, when he began to blame himself she began to find excuses for him.

"I will not have you speak harshly of yourself," she said; "our best feelings sometimes lead us wrong. It was love for your father made you deceive him; if anything had happened to him you would never have forgiven yourself."

"That is exactly how it was," he rejoined, brightening up; "and after all it does not so very much matter; we can tell him all about it by-and-bye."

"Yes," she answered, slowly; "I am only sorry you promised to take me down to Brantynham, because you must see it is impossible I can go."

He could not look in her frank, noble face and ask her in plain simple words to join

him in the deception. He turned his eyes away as he answered—

“Well, I have placed both myself and you in an unpleasant predicament, I admit. You can never blame me so much as I blame myself; but still, Queenie, I must rely on you to help me through with it.”

“How can I?” she asked. “Show me the way and I will?” He did not speak; she looked at him inquiringly, adding, “Shall I go down and explain everything? I am sure I can make your father understand and appreciate your motive; it was all for his sake.” Jasper shook his head.

“There must be no explanations yet. We must bide our time,” he answered; “when my father has learned to know and love you, which he will do before the first twenty-four hours are over—unless I am much mistaken—the task will be easy. I shall leave the management of affairs in

your hands ; you have more tenderness and tact than I, and can tell him all."

"But, Jasper dear," she answered, "of course if I go down my very presence there speaks for itself, and tells him all that can be told, does it not? When your father sees and knows me as your wife there will be nothing left to tell."

"That is exactly where the awkwardness lies," replied Jasper; "you must not go down as my acknowledged wife."

"As what then?" she asked.

"As your father's daughter!" he answered, a little impatiently. "I wish, dear, you would try and comprehend without forcing me to speak plainly. I wish you, just for a time—a very short time—to forget we have been married, and conduct yourself, in the eyes of the Brantynham people, at least, as my bride elect, till the time

ripens and we can acknowledge ourselves openly as man and wife!"

Philippa had turned deadly pale while he was speaking; she was not of an emotional nature generally, but her lips twitched nervously, and something seemed to rise in her throat and strangle her words before she uttered them, as she answered—

"I see; you want me to lay aside *your* name, which I—I am so proud to call *mine*, and become plain Philippa Maitland again?"

"Something like that," he said, "though I don't quite like the way you put it."

"And so go down to your father," she rejoined, "and present myself to him as his son's chosen wife, a liar and impostor! Oh, Jasper! I cannot do it."

"You might gloss the matter over, Queenie," he answered, in a low voice, "but you use the plainest, coarsest words. However, never mind, it is the first time I

have asked you to do anything for my sake."

"We don't both consider it in the same way," she answered. "You cannot see what a dreadful, wicked thing it is to do! Just think. I am to go to your father's house in a false character, and act as a hypocrite and a liar for days or weeks; then, when I have found a false way to his heart, I am to discover my baseness, and tell him I am your wife! You cannot mean that I should do this! Remember Jacob committed a fraud upon a blind man, and was execrated for ages, nay, is execrated now."

"Some commit worse frauds every day, and are never execrated at all," rejoined Jasper, with a recklessness unusual for him and unsuited to the occasion.

"You are not yourself," she answered, almost shrinking away from him; "you

pain me when you speak like that. I don't believe it can be my Jasper at all; you are trying to speak like somebody else." A sudden thought seemed to strike her. She made him turn his face towards her, as she added, with a naïve smile, "Let me look at you. I do believe you are saying all this to try me, to see if I will do a wicked thing at your bidding; and if I give way you'll be the first to turn round and scold me! For shame, sir, frightening me in this way for nothing! I believed you at first; you jest in such a serious fashion."

"I am horribly in earnest," he rejoined, "and I have told you exactly the truth." After a moment's pause he added, "But don't think anything more about it, dear. Having once got myself into a hole, I ought to have struggled out of it, without trying to drag you in. Kiss me, Queenie, and

forgive me for having troubled you about it. There, put your arms round my neck, so, and forget everything, except how much I love you."

He made it evident to her that he wished to dismiss the subject from her mind, and, as far as he could, from his own also. He led the conversation as far away from the matter as he could, told her some funny stories, and gave her a lively sketch of his travelling companions; but the cheerful ring had died out of his voice, and his laughter was the very ghost of a laugh. Indeed, a man more ill at ease and dissatisfied with himself could not well have been found. He had lowered himself in his own and in Philippa's eyes; she had exalted him almost to the gods, and believed him to be the "goodliest man that ever before ladies ate in hall," and he had shown himself to be a man weak enough to fall, and wicked

enough to tempt a purer soul to sin likewise.

But he put a bold face upon the matter, and a stranger would have envied him his good spirits. He alluded to Philippa's visit to Brantynham no more. Now that he showed a desire to avoid the subject, she felt inclined to discuss it; to talk it over with him in a sympathetic, womanly way. By some strange inconsistency of human nature for which there is no accounting she suffered some twinges of conscience, fancying that she had not been all she ought to have been on the occasion. This was his first trouble—self-made truly—but he had been drawn into it partly through her, for if there had been no Philippa Maitland there could have come no such trouble to Jasper Brantynham. He had confided in her, opened his heart to her, and told her frankly how the matter

stood, and she had thrown him back upon himself. She might have helped him, she ought to have said something or have done something, anything short of the imposition —*that* she resolved never to do. She had said things that could not have been pleasant to him, and he had taken it so sweetly, never reproaching her or saying an unkind word. If he had been angry she might have been doubly strong in her revolt against his doings, so much do the moods of women vary with circumstances. She longed to speak, but he showed no inclination to resume the subject; rather a determination to avoid it. Early in the evening Mr. Maitland came home, and he and Jasper sat down to play a game at chess, Jasper submitting to be beaten, and allowing himself to be cheated in the most bare-faced way; it was his mode of supplying Philippa's father with loose cash. The old

man rubbed his hands and chuckled gleefully when he found his adversary "checkmated."

Although Jasper cleared his brow, Philippa saw that the shadow lay strong upon his heart, and she longed to throw her arms round his neck and comfort him. Where should he turn for comfort if not to her, his wife? and she had repulsed him. She had been, morally speaking, "right," no doubt; but the greatest right is sometimes the cruelest wrong. She longed to put aside his mask of pleasant smiles and tender words, and peep into his heart and see what he really thought of her, whether, she having been once so unsympathetic, he would ever bring his troubles or follies home to her again. Ah, how good, how kind, how noble he had been to her! and she, how cold and ungrateful!

The next morning at breakfast a tele-

gram was delivered to Jasper. To those who are not accustomed to correspond through the telegraphic influence there is generally something alarming in the thin yellow-enveloped scrap of paper. "Ill-news flies apace," they say, and it flashes with cruel swiftness along those voiceless wires, which despatch the messages of life or death, ruin or success, from one end of the world to the other. Jasper eyed the missive with some anxiety for a moment; his hand trembled slightly as he set down his cup of untasted coffee and opened it. Short and simple enough it was, containing only these words, "From George J. Brantynham, of Brantynham, to Jasper Brantynham, London.—Come home immediately on receipt of this. News from abroad." That was all.

Glancing across the table he met Philippa's eyes watching his face anxiously. He handed her the telegram with a smile, saying,

"Nothing very alarming, except that I must be off at once, as you see." He looked at his watch, adding, "There's plenty of time; I shall be able to catch the 12.20 train from Waterloo."

"Have you any idea what the news can be?" asked Philippa. "What relations have you got abroad? Are you very much interested in them?"

"I have only an uncle, my father's twin brother, who is a merchant in Calcutta," replied Jasper. "I ought to be very much interested in him; he is very rich, they say, and I have, or ought to have, great expectations from him," he added, smiling, as though he had not much faith in them.

"You have no fears about your father?" said Philippa.

"Not the least! You see it especially states 'News from abroad.' Who knows,

it may turn out that you have married half a millionaire, Queenie!"

"I don't care for the millionaire part of the business," she answered. "Sometimes I wish you were quite poor, that I might do something; not take all and give nothing."

Of course Jasper replied in the most approved poetical phrases, that she was the most munificent giver of beauty, grace, and love; that she made all the sunshine of his life, and the world would be a barren place without her.

She shook her head, and said that she was not half worthy of him and he was far too good for her; and at that moment she believed what she said.

When he went into his room to repack his valise she offered to go and help him; but he said "No, there was no need to trouble her; he was too much a bachelor to need a lady's help."

“He is vexed with me,” she thought, “though he takes such pains to hide it, and it serves me right.”

He had not been gone many minutes when she followed him; his small portmanteau lay open half packed upon the floor, and he was seated, resting his head upon his hand in an attitude of deep thought. So occupied he was that he did not hear her come into the room, and was unconscious of her presence till she came up to his side, put her arms round his neck, and set a soft kiss upon his forehead, saying—

“I cannot part with you even for another day. Philippa Maitland is going with her lord to Brantynham.”

His face brightened and he was not slow to return her caress; then, taking both her hands in his and bending a look of loving inquiry on her face, he said—

"You will not do this to-day and repent to-morrow? You go with the full approval of your own conscience?"

"Not quite that, Jasper dear," she answered, frankly, "but I feel I ought to uphold your word and carry out your promise; it is in some sort a pleasure for me to do it. Of course I would rather there were no necessity for this, but granting the necessity I do it with all my heart and soul."

"When will you be ready to start?" he said, with some emotion, which he tried to still; he did not like to show her all he felt, nor how much he appreciated the sacrifice. He knew it was a sacrifice she was making for his sake.

"You said you wanted to catch the 12:20 train," she answered; "well, I'll be ready to start with you."

"Thanks! that will be charming," he

rejoined heartily. "You can have your traps sent after you."

"Indeed, no," she answered; "there will be no need for that. I shall travel in elephantine fashion, and carry my trunk wherever I go."

"You don't know how much I thank you for this, Queenie," he said, detaining her as she was leaving the room. "My pride, as well as my self-love, was wounded by your first refusal, though I could say nothing against it."

"You were angry too," rejoined Philippa.

"Not angry, only hurt and humbled; but I would never have asked you again. I love you for your pure, true, and noble nature," he added, "yet, driven by force of circumstances, *I* have been the man to tempt you to do wrong."

"Don't reproach yourself, please," said

Philippa, smiling brightly. "I am even glad to do a little wrong for your sake."

"In a few weeks all will be right," he said, "and my wife will occupy her proper place in my father's house; as for this unpleasant episode, we shall soon forget it when the end of it has come."

He spoke of the end of that episode as though any man could look in the future and see the "end of anything." If he could have foreseen the end of "that day's business" it would never have been begun.





CHAPTER VI.

DIFFICULTIES DEEPEN.

YOU don't seem at all anxious about the news from abroad, Jasper," said Philippa, as they sat in the cosy coupé of the railway carriage, and were being whirled through the air at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

"Why no, not exactly," he answered. "I suppose the old gentleman is ill, dying, or dead; well, he has lived his day, and a long prosperous jolly day it has been by all accounts. I can't be expected to make myself miserable about an elderly relative whom I have never seen, though he does happen to be my paternal uncle."

“But your father! In his precarious state there is no knowing how he may be affected by the news, whatever it is.”

“True, there is the governor to be considered,” he rejoined. “How thoughtful you are! But I don’t suppose he’ll take it very much to heart, they have been separated more than thirty years; and if he does we shall be there to comfort him.”

“Does your father live at Brantynham Hall quite alone?” she asked.

“Bless my soul, no,” he answered, looking at her in some surprise. “Is it possible I have never told you all about the delightful society you’ll find in legalized possession of my manorial halls.”

“Indeed you have never said a word about them,” she answered; “but perhaps that was because I never asked you, and we have had so many other things to talk about.”

"I daresay yours is the right summing up, Queenie," he said; "but the fact is I have not cared to say much about my father's matrimonial relations. Perhaps it would be as well now to give you a verbal introduction before you have the delight of making their personal acquaintance."

"Will it be a delight, Jasper, or are you speaking satirically? You do sometimes, and it is difficult to know whether you mean a thing or not."

Now Jasper did not really wish to prejudice her against his home household; on the contrary, he desired that their acquaintance should begin on the mutual admiration system. It would be unwise to inoculate her with his dislikes, as she was going among them under peculiar circumstances, and much of her comfort and happiness would depend upon their goodwill; so he answered her questioning prudently.

"I'm speaking in sober seriousness, and I hope you will all like one another and get on well together."

"But who do you mean by all?" she asked.

"Well, first and foremost there's my father's wife, my step-mother; if she is only tender and kind to you, my darling, I'll forgive her for being Mrs. Brantynham."

"People never like their step-mothers," was the observation Philippa made to herself.

"Then," continued Jasper, "there's Joseph Atherton and Kate, her son and daughter."

"Are they nice?" she asked again.

"Well, that depends upon how you take them. What's one man's meat is another man's poison. I don't care much about Joe myself, but he is a great favourite with some people and nearly six feet high ;

and Kate is a dear, kind, sensible little thing. I hope you will like her and be good friends."

"What sort of a girl is she?" asked Philippa. "Pretty, clever, and accomplished, I suppose?"

"Well, I am hardly a fair judge of that," he answered; "when we like people we don't look at them with ordinary eyes. You know the veriest fool may be a hero in the eyes of the woman who loves him. It is much the same thing with one's friends, we never think of taking them at other people's valuation, but at our own; and speaking of Kate, I should say she had the usual amount of common sense without being particularly clever, and I know she can make unrecognisable sketches of home scenery, play a waltz in tolerable time and tune, and even struggle through a sonata in Beethoven without much blundering.

Considering her beauty, well, I should call her a pretty piquante little thing, and rather a flirt; I speak as an outsider, for she has never flirted with *me*."

"You give a very interesting description of her," said Philippa. "How strange that you never told me about her before! How was it?" Why was it that, as she looked at him with a glance of innocent inquiry, the blood rose slowly to his face till it deepened into a blush. He was vexed and angry at this involuntary suffusion of his cheeks. It was a false signal which had no business there; it might mislead suspicious eyes. He had no reason to blush at the thought or the name of Kate Atherton.

"Well, I have not told you about her, Queenie, because there was nothing to tell," he answered.

"I wonder you did not fall in love with

her instead of me," said Philippa, with a coquettish smile.

"Do you," he rejoined, a little impatiently; "for goodness sake, Philippa, don't talk such nonsense; men don't fall in love with their own sisters, and Kate is like a sister to me."

The train dashed into a tunnel as he was speaking, and when they emerged from it Jasper managed to direct the conversation into a different channel, as a skilful hand on the wheel turns the vessel out of the rough strong current into the desired direction.

When the train reached the station Jasper glanced from the window and found the carriage had been sent to meet them. He smiled, satisfied, and as they stepped upon the platform, Mrs. Brantynham and Kate came forward to receive them. He performed the office of introduction in the best way he could, though his cheek

tingled as he presented "Miss Maitland" to Mrs. Brantynham and Miss Atherton. They shook hands, smiled, bowed, and made the usual commonplace inquiries and remarks, and Mrs. Brantynham "hoped they had had a pleasant journey down," etc. The two girls looked at each other silently, as though they were taking mental stock of each other's attractions and wondering how they should like one another. In the course of a few minutes they had taken their seats in the carriage, crack went the whip, and they were bowling along on the road to Brantynham Hall.

"I hope you'll not find it cool, Miss Maitland," said Mrs. Brantynham. "I always consult Jasper's taste, and he prefers an open carriage in all weathers, except it rains or snows."

Philippa was delighted to find how Jasper was considered, and how deferen-

tially he was treated by his step-mother. She thought the drive charming, and said so. She found something to admire, some inquiry to make, at every turn. Who lived at this place? Who at that? And what was the name of that quaint crumbling old church surrounded by its mossy graves? All which inquiries Kate took upon herself to answer with alacrity, and gave Philippa some pleasant little scraps of local information as well, interspersed with anecdotes about their neighbours; while Mrs. Brantynham leaned back in her seat smiling benignantly, exchanging a word now and then with Jasper.

Presently they drove on to the Brantynham Manor; the old Hall came in sight, its quaint gables first rising from between the thick growing beech-trees, with the pine wood lying darkly below, and the shining river that ran like a silver serpent through

the distant meadows. Philippa was charmed with the view; and when, as they drove along the broad avenue, the whole frontage of the grey old pile came in sight, she was in silent ecstasies.

So this was Jasper's home! the place where he was born and his fathers before him; and in the common course of things it would be her home, his home for all the years to come. A tide of thought and feeling, hope and fear, rose up, flooded her mind, and sent her heart up into her throat. If she and Jasper had been alone her hand would have found its way to his and been clasped close therein, while the happy tears flowed free and fast. As it was, her eyes filled slowly; she was afraid to look at Jasper for fear they should brim over.

The deer were cropping grass under the shadow of the wide-spreading branches, and some shy, startled fawns turned about and

stared at them with their large wild eyes as they passed along. Mr. Brantynham had had his chair wheeled out into the open verandah, where he could catch glimpses of the carriage as it wound along the distant lanes long before it reached the gates of Brantynham. He waved his hand and smiled at them as they drove up the avenue. When they alighted at the Hall door, instead of entering the house, Jasper gave his arm to Philippa and went round the verandah to where his father was seated. The old man made an ineffectual attempt to rise up as they approached. As he sank back helplessly in his chair he said—

“ You must excuse my rising ; I’m not so active as I was, and my useless limbs bind me to my chair.” Jasper presented Philippa to him ; the girl blushed as he took her hand, and instinctively bent forward for him to kiss her cheek.

“You are welcome to Brantynham Hall, my dear,” he added; “and I hope you will live here as long as I have. I don’t know whether that is a kind wish, though,” he said, scrutinizing her face with his dulled eyes; “perhaps you would not care to live to see your youth go and your beauty wither away, till you became a mouldy old skeleton like me,” he concluded, with grim facetiousness. These words were not calculated to present a very pleasant idea to any girl’s mind, but she answered him with that womanly tact which rarely failed her.

“I don’t think I should mind getting as old as you are, if I had as many friends to care for me as you have, and deserved them as well.”

He nodded graciously, patted her hand, and said—

“Very prettily put, my dear; I see we shall be very good friends.” At this

moment a servant came to announce the fact that Mr. Crosby had arrived in answer to Mr. Brantynham's summons, and was now waiting for him in the library. Thither the old man directed himself to be wheeled at once. Addressing himself to Philippa, he said, "You had better return to the ladies; I'm sure they will make you at home. You, Jasper, will come with me; I've had news from your Uncle Robert. He is dangerously ill, perhaps dying; and—— But we will talk the matter over with Mr. Crosby."

Kate met Philippa half way round the verandah.

"Will you go into the house at once, or would you like a walk through the grounds first? But perhaps you are tired with your journey."

"I am not at all tired, and I should like a walk above all things; after a railway journey a ramble is always refreshing."

As the two girls sauntered together across the lawn each regarded the other with curious eyes.

"You must let me congratulate you in a friendly, sisterly way," said Kate, smiling brightly up at the tall stately girl at her side; "I'm so glad to have you at Brynham." Glancing shyly at Philippa she added, "You won't mind my being so personal as to say that you are just the sort of girl I should fancy he would have chosen. Have you known him very long?"

"Nearly three years," answered Philippa.

"And have you been engaged all that time?" asked Kate, opening wide her eyes.

"No! oh no!" replied Philippa. "We were engaged for—only a few months."

"Jasper is a dear, good fellow," rejoined Kate; "people about here will think you a very fortunate girl for securing him."

“That is exactly what I think myself, Kate. I may call you Kate, may I not?”

“Pray do, I shall prefer it, and I will return the compliment by calling you Philippa,” replied Kate; adding, “I hope you’ll not find it dull here. I suppose Jasper has told you all about us.”

“No, indeed,” said Philippa. “I did not even know there was a ‘Kate’ at Brantynham till we had started in the railway train, and I scolded him all the way down.”

“He never told you anything at all about us! How very strange,” said Kate; and they walked on silently a few moments, when she added, “We have always been such close friends, too, I almost wonder how he could talk about himself without in some way referring to me; I should have thought my name would be sure to crop up among the flowers of conversation. But old tunes must

give way to new," she added, laughing; "and I must say he had a very good excuse for forgetting me." They chatted on pleasantly enough. Kate, however, had the monopoly of the conversation and the choice of subjects. She catechized Philippa about her life in London, where she lived, what she did, and whether her father was as great an invalid as Mr. Brantynham, and many other things; to all of which Philippa replied in as truthful and straightforward way as she could. Kate thought her a nice, strikingly beautiful, noble-minded girl, even worthy, so far as appearances went, of her idol Jasper, but very reserved and uncommunicative.

Presently looking forward across the meadow lands they saw a gentleman swing slowly along towards them.

"Here comes my brother Joe," said Kate, "and I shall have the pleasure of introduc-

buildings Philippa inquired what they were.

"They are the stables, Miss Maitland," he answered, "and are under my special care. Would you like to go over them? Are you fond of horses?"

"Yes," Philippa said, she should like to go over them; and she was fond of horses, though she did not know much about them.

"You ride, of course; I believe you London ladies spend half your time cantering up and down Rotten Row."

Philippa acknowledged that she had never had an opportunity of indulging in that melancholy monotonous amusement; indeed, had never been on a horse's back.

"We'll soon teach you to ride," he answered; "Jasper is a splendid horseman, I'm not a bad one, and as for my little sister

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ing him to you. I dare say he would rather present himself to you for the first time in a suit of broadcloth and a chimney-pot hat; though I think knickerbockers and wide-awakes are becoming to some people."

Philippa lifted her eyes and noticed the figure advancing towards them. He was dressed in a well-fitting cut-away coat, knickerbockers, grey-worsted stockings, and a broad-brimmed sombrero-like wide-awake. She thought the dress very becoming. As he came up to them he doffed his hat, made his bow, and was presented by his sister as "My brother Joe." He was delighted to meet Miss Maitland, and turned and walked by their side, pointing out particular views as worthy of special admiration. They skirted the shrubberies on their way back to the Hall, and noticing a low-lying block of quaint gabled

buildings Philippa inquired what they were.

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Kate, when once she is mounted she looks as though she were screwed to the back of her steed. We shall be able to get up some pleasant riding parties, among other things."

"Are you at all timid?" inquired Kate, and Joseph took upon himself to answer, as he gazed admiringly on her face,

"I should think not! She does not look as though she could be afraid of anything."

"I don't think I can endorse your flattering opinion exactly," replied Philippa, laughing, "but I believe I am as courageous as most of my sex. I don't think I should mind mounting a bare-backed steed and riding round the meadows this moment. I should fall on a soft place if I couldn't keep my seat, and I'd try to do that, even if I clung to his mane or tail, I should not be particular which," added the excited girl, who had often watched the equestrian

parties in Rotten Row with a tingling in her blood and her soul in her eyes, longing to be one of them. Now such a thing might be ; who could tell ?

By this time they had entered the stables, where there were some half-dozen horses stalled in loose boxes. Mr. Atherton's voice was evidently recognised as the voice of a friend, for they tossed their heads and snorted when they heard it. Having duly admired them one after another, Philippa went into ecstasies over the beauty of a bright bay mare of exquisite proportions, about fifteen hands high, with long silky mane and tail, and a coat as glossy and smooth as satin, and mild, wistful brown eyes.

"What a lovely creature ! What is her name ?" asked Philippa, stepping towards her, but Joe stopped her.

"Flash-o'-fire," he answered ; "and she's

the greatest dare-devil and most vicious beast in the stable."

"I'm sure you malign her," replied Philippa, gathering together her skirts and marching wilfully towards the animal's head. Joe laid a detaining hand upon her, and said--

"Pray mind what you're about, Miss Maitland. If you will go near her I wont be answerable for the consequences; even Kate has prudence enough to keep out of her way."

Philippa smiled and passed on; by the time he had finished speaking she stood at the creature's head, smoothing its ears and patting its arching neck, talking to it in a caressing, cooing kind of voice. Flash-o'-fire turned its head and gravely inspected the new friend who was so unceremoniously making its acquaintance. It shook its head, pawed the ground, and gave a gentle neigh

of satisfaction, as though disposed to be friendly and determined to vindicate its character from the slur Mr. Atherton had put upon it.

“Dear maligned Flash-o’-fire!” said Philippa. “Give me some corn, will you? I should like to feed it.”

She gained possession of a measure of corn and a handful of hay, and the mare followed her round the stable-yard, taking first some corn and then a mouthful of hay alternately. “You see it follows me and lets me pat it; I am sure it is as gentle as a lamb.”

“It certainly is showing some lamblike qualities now,” rejoined Joe, eyeing the creature curiously. “As a rule, I assure you, it is vicious in the extreme; even the stablemen have to be very careful how they approach it.”

“They are rough-natured, and don’t

know how to treat such a beautiful sensitive thing as Flash-o'-fire. I believe these intelligent creatures have all a touch of our human nature, and while they rebel at any rough rude handling, they will yield to a gentle touch. If ever I ride at Brantynham I'll mount Flash-o'-fire."

"You'll not do that for a long time to come; she's only half broken in as yet," replied Joseph. "I like to hear you talk, though, for above all things I admire pluck in a woman."

Flash-o'-fire was returned into her loose box and they all slowly sauntered to the house.

Philippa enjoyed her ramble extremely; she liked all the members of the family, so far, extremely, Kate especially. She could not think why Jasper had been so silent respecting his family. She had scarcely entered the house and been shown up to

her room, a charming apartment with a wide western view over the park and distant country, when the dinner-bell rang. She made a hasty toilette and descended to the drawing-room, where she found the ladies of the family already assembled. Joe was the next to make his appearance, and he was evidently bent on being specially agreeable to their beautiful visitor; he brought her a bouquet of the choicest flowers, and throwing himself into a seat beside her, began a conversation with her in an easy friendly way, in which Kate joined, both uniting in their efforts to make her feel at home. Mrs. Brantynham, too, was lavish of her smiles, and occasionally threw in a word by way of embellishing the conversation. Philippa liked her less than the other members of the family; indeed, although her tone was agreeable enough, her phrases politely turned with an evident desire to

make a favourable impression, there was something in her manner which had a repellant effect on Philippa, though on that day, the first of her arrival, she would not acknowledge so much even to herself.

Dinner had just been announced when Jasper came into the room. He glanced hastily round, and seeing they were all assembled apologized for being late and hoped "he had not kept dinner waiting;" adding, "My father would like his dinner sent into the library, and begs you to excuse his joining you this evening."

"He is not ill, I hope," said Mrs. Brantynham. "Perhaps I had better go to him."

"Pray don't!" said Jasper, hastily; "he has been rather excited and is now a little exhausted; that's all."

"Talking over this Calcutta business, I

suppose," said Joe. "I'm not surprised at his feeling it."

Jasper offered his arm to Mrs. Brantynham, Joe gave his to Philippa, and Kate followed them as they filed off into the dining-room. Philippa was accustomed to read every variation in Jasper's countenance, and she knew by the look of it now that he was sorely troubled.

The conversation while the soup and fish was being handed round was of the dullest and most commonplace description, as indeed it usually is in small family parties while the domestic detectives are on duty. Philippa sat on thorns. She thought the dinner never would be ended; she longed to speak to Jasper, and wondered when and how she should get an opportunity of a perfectly private tête-à-tête. The grave shadow lay still upon his face; she *would* know what it was that troubled him, even

though they were driven into a corner and compelled to pour out their hearts' secrets over a photographic album.

She speculated as to what they were going to do when dinner was over. Most likely they would retire to the drawing-room, coffee would be served, and then she thought perhaps some stupid game might be proposed, or she might be asked to play or sing, or invited to look at pictures or over albums—all innocent pleasant amusements enough in their way, but in her present state of mind they would be intolerable to her.

What was the matter with Jasper? She fancied it was something more than a mere family matter, something that closely concerned her; for more than once she found his eyes fixed upon her face with a look of incomprehensible love and painful speculation. She felt keenly her anomalous posi-

tion now, and vainly wished she had never come to Brantynham Hall. She was not, however, allowed to indulge her anxiously agitated feelings uninterruptedly, but was compelled occasionally to throw in an assenting smile or contribute a morsel of conversation to the general stock. Then she was scolded for having no appetite, and everybody proposed her having something different from what she had got. At last they got through the substantial part of the business of dining, the servants withdrew, and they were left to crack nuts at discretion.

The discourse then naturally drifted from generalities to strict family matters.

"I suppose you have had all the news from over the water," said Mr. Atherton, after a few preliminary remarks.

"Yes, I suppose I have," replied Jasper; "for we have been three hours discussing it."

"If report speaks truth you'll have a nice haul. A hundred thousand pounds at least," rejoined Joe.

"Not I," replied Jasper; "whatever there is will be my father's, not mine. But these matters are always grossly exaggerated; I put no faith in vague reports."

"I don't know what you call vague reports," said Mr. Atherton. "I say we have a positive statement of the fact. Your father thinks some member of the family ought to go over to Calcutta; it can't be me, for I could not be spared from Brantynham."

Jasper scowled at him ferociously across the table and commenced paring an apple for Philippa, as he answered—

"I don't know. Of course you would be horribly missed; but unfortunately you are not a fixture, and some day Brantyn-

ham will be compelled to get on without you."

While he was speaking Mrs. Brantynham smiled, bowed, and set the silent telegraph in motion; the ladies rose and left the room. Jasper, who held the door for them to pass out, smiled a loving smile on Philippa, pressed her hand, and said, or half-whispered—

"Don't leave the house; wait for me. I'll be with you in five minutes."





CHAPTER VII.

A SUDDEN PARTING.

MR. ATHERTON'S announcement that "somebody must go to Calcutta," and he could not be spared from Brantynham, sent a thrill of cold apprehension to Philippa's heart. It cannot be said that she thought or feared any special thing; her feelings were too vague to be called "thoughts." She was, however, strangely agitated by nameless doubts and fears, which had all been called forth by a single glance at Jasper's face; but when we love much we fear much, though we cannot give our fears a name. Mrs. Brantynham went direct from the dining-room to her .

husband's study, and remained there closeted with him some time ; the girls retired to the drawing-room, but had scarcely time to exchange a few words before Jasper joined them and proposed a twilight ramble.

“ I know you like to be out in the gloaming, when the owls and bats are abroad ; so put on your hat, Philippa, and throw something warm over your shoulders, for the dews are falling, and we will have a pleasant saunter. We may be able to get through the pine wood and come home by moonlight ; the moon will be rising presently.”

Philippa was not slow to accept this invitation. Her heart beat wildly, her eyes brightened ; for the next few hours at least he would be her own again ! It was absurd ! they had been so few hours at Brantynham —yet those few hours lay like a gulph between them. A temporary bridge was,

however, to be thrown over it now, and they would be together again alone, to wander away in the woods and talk together beneath the silent stars, with no false formality between them, no mask to hide the love-light in their faces; no need to shroud the sweet familiarity that lives between true husband and true wife.

“You don’t invite *me* to go with you,” exclaimed Kate, with a pretty toss of her head; “but I suppose you act upon the principle that ‘two’s company, three’s none.’”

“I am afraid it is something like that in the present instance,” replied Jasper; then he added, in a low earnest voice, “I shall be going away soon, Kate; may I trust you to be kind to Philippa, to love her a little at first for my sake? When you know her better you will love her for her own.

You have been such a true sisterly friend to *me*, Kate," he added, taking her hand and looking very tenderly on her, "that I bespeak *your* regard for the one I love and prize above all the world. If you were not here I would not leave my darling at Brantynham at all, heartily as my father desires she should stay. I shall go away happier if I know you will be always, and under all circumstances, her friend." He bent down and kissed her forehead, as he had done with the same brotherly affection a hundred times before.

Kate was too overpowered with her own emotions to speak. This man (whom she loved, whom she had loved always, and fancied she had loved hopelessly) was beseeching her friendship and affection for the woman who had won what she had longed and craved for all her life; she knew now how much of hope had really mingled

with the love she had given unasked, she knew now that she had never wholly despaired till she learned he had given his love and pledged his hand to another. Even then the old passion would not die out, his kiss seemed to leave a burning mark upon her forehead. Her face blazed crimson as his lips rested there; she could have shrieked or sobbed aloud, but, with that wonderful mastery which women have over their strongest feelings, she crushed down all visible emotion, and only snatched her hand from his grasp and turned abruptly away, as she answered—

“I would befriend a worse woman for your sake; she is so beautiful, it will be easy work to love her.”

As she was hurrying out of the room she met Philippa entering. The lamp from the outer hall, which was already lighted, fell full on Kate's face. Philippa

saw that her face was pale and her eyes seemed full of crushed tears; tears that had come unbidden and were never meant to fall. In answer to Philippa's look of inquiring sympathetic surprise, Kate kissed her as she passed out, saying—

“That Jasper of yours has been ridiculously pathetic, bespeaking my friendship for you in serio-comic phrases, as though you would not *force* it from me, you beautiful witch, whether I were willing to give it or not. Now be off,” she added, with a laugh; “there's Jasper scowling with impatience.”

Philippa joined him, and the two stepped out in the verandah and slowly sauntered across the lawn. They did not talk of anything that specially concerned themselves till they got into the plantation out of the sight of prying eyes and listening ears; then, with quick, shortcoming breath, Philippa said—

“Jasper, I am not going to ask you any questions, but please tell me everything. And first of all, what made you look so terribly troubled when you came into the dining-room.”

Jasper shook his head.

“I’m afraid, darling,” he answered, “that bit of information must come last of all, and at the tail of many other little matters that may pave the way to it. First tell me how you like Brantynham, and—and my father’s family?”

“Oh, well enough,” replied Philippa, feeling he was putting her off from what she wanted to know. “Of course I like everything and everybody well enough; but my world lies in and with you, and I want to know what is the matter. Something terrible has happened, or is going to happen. Even in this dusky light I can see it in your face, hear it in your quick, nervous tread.

What is it, Jasper? For God's sake tell me, do?" She stopped and clasped both hands upon his arm, and looked up in his face in an agony of fear.

"Don't, my darling, don't get excited; you frighten me when you look so!" he answered, soothingly, "and it is nothing so very dreadful after all. See here, Philippa, I am going to tell you now I own I *am* sorely troubled; but it is not on my own account, it is not for myself, but for *you*."

"But why for me?" she answered. "Are you afraid I shall not be able to play out my rôle? or has your father heard anything? or does he suspect me and desire I should be turned out of the house, and you have not courage to go with me? or——"

"What folly!" he said, interrupting her. "How can you think anything so foolish?"

My father is almost as much in love with you as I am."

"Well then," she exclaimed, quickly, her face brightening, "what else can there be worth troubling about? You see I am not quite so frightened as I was!" her lips broke into a smile as she spoke. "So far I only know what does *not* trouble you; now I want to know what does? You cannot put me off, I *will* know. Is it anything to do with that dreadful uncle in Calcutta? You may as well tell me at first as at last. I must know."

"You must indeed, my darling, and the first and the last will come close together," he answered, "with only a few short hours between. You like Brantynham Hall, Queenie; do you think you could be happy here three months?"

"What a question; as though I could not be happy here or anywhere for three months

or three years, so long as we are both together."

"Ay! there lies the question," he rejoined. "Suppose we were not together. Could you stay here without me?"

"For three months! No! nor for three days; why should I?"

"Suppose I were to tell you there is a necessity for us to be separated for a time," he added; "you would be strong for my sake, you would try to bear it."

"If it were necessary for your sake that I should thrust my arm into a furnace and watch it slowly burn off, I think I should have courage to do it; but I must judge of the necessity *myself*." She looked superbly heroic for the moment; but as she looked in his face and saw how much he was disturbed, how depressed and grieved he looked, her heroic seeming broke down, and all the agitation of her spirit surged up into her

face and overflowed in her voice as she added, "But there can be no need for our parting! no need for anything so terrible as that! Don't say there is, Jasper! don't; it would kill me! I could not bear it." Her voice failed her, it was choked with sobs, as she struggled hard to keep the tell-tale tears from falling.

"Hush! darling, hush! for God's sake don't take on like this," exclaimed Jasper, keeping his own agitation well under control. "I had no idea you would allow yourself to be carried away by the mere apprehension of a thing! I have never said it must be, only that it *may* be. If you will only be calm I will tell you everything that has transpired between my father and me, and I will leave the matter in your hands. You shall judge, you shall decide—I will act precisely as you wish."

Then as they were walking there under

the shadow of the grand old trees, he told her, as briefly and yet as comprehensively as he could, the gist of that "news from abroad" which had so discomposed him.

It appeared that a letter, written by dictation, had been sent from Mr. Brantynham's twin brother Robert, who had resided for more than thirty years abroad, stating that he was seriously ill, and in certain, though not immediate danger, and that he longed before he died to look his own flesh and blood in the face once more. This point he urged eloquently, yearning and pleading that one of his own kith and kin would come over the seas and close his eyes and see him laid to rest. It was a desolate and touching word-painted picture of an old helpless man, stretching out his hands, lifting up his voice, and sending a cry over the seas for his own kindred, and Philippa felt it so. It touched a sensitive

chord in her sympathetic nature; she never interrupted him by a word, but kept her eyes fastened on his face, and if he paused for a second begged him to "go on." The old man had mentioned Jasper by name; he craved that his twin brother's son, his own natural heir, should be by his bedside now. The letter was very long and treated of other things concerning matters of business which had no interest for Philippa, except so far as they affected Jasper. There was an enclosure from a gentleman who had been his friend for years, which strongly urged the necessity of some member of the family coming over in their own interest to look after affairs there; stating that since Mr. R. Brantynham's illness, his business affairs had been neglected to a ruinous extent. It took Jasper a long time to explain and go into the details of what is written here

in a few words; when he had done he said—

“Now, darling, I have told you everything; think over the matter and say what you will have me do, and I will abide by your decision as though you were a judge upon the bench, I will not enter a protest even of a single word. I place myself like a feather in your hands; you may blow me which way you will.”

“How kind and considerate you are,” said Philippa, thoroughly appreciating his concession to her desire. “Your father, I suppose, wishes you to go?”

“Yes, but if my wife says ‘Stay,’ I stay.”

“Your wife would scarcely be worth calling *yours* if she took so mean an advantage of your love as to turn you from your duty,” said Philippa, with heightened colour; “so your wife says, Go! Jasper,

go; but remember you take the joy of poor Philippa's life away; bring it back to her soon." Her lips grew tremulous and her eyes humid as she finished speaking.

"That is what I knew my darling would say when she had time to think," rejoined Jasper, looking with proud admiration upon her upturned face. "I feel I *ought* to go, Queenie, and you must know it costs me a bitter pang to part from you, even for so short a time as three months."

"So short a time!" repeated Philippa, "it seems an eternity to me. They will be the three longest months of all my life; and yet—though it half breaks my heart to part with you—even if you were inclined to stay, knowing all I know now, I should urge you to go. I would not, for all my world of selfish love, keep you from that old man's bedside."

"You are the true helpmeet for a man's life," replied Jasper; "you would never drag him down or hold him back when honour or duty says 'Go on.'"

"I hope I should rather cry 'Excelsior' and march on the upward path beside him," she answered.

"But then you are so unselfish, darling," he rejoined; "so far above the silly weaknesses of sentimental women."

"You judge me by what I *seem*, not by what I *am*," she answered. "I *will* myself to be brave and strong; but if you only knew what I think and feel, hope and fear, you would stigmatize me as the silliest and weakest of my sex. I have often thought when there is need for strength then strength comes. At this moment I hardly realize the truth of what we have been talking about; it seems scarcely possible that you and I, who are walking here now, may soon

be hundreds or thousands of miles apart! It seems too dreadful to be true."

"It is unfortunate things should have happened so just now," replied Jasper. "One thing, however, I am glad of; I leave you here in my father's house, where I know you will be well cared for, and as happy as you can be without my worthless self. I shall write to you very often, and shall expect the sweetest, longest, lovingest letters in reply, and shall be as surly as a bear if I don't get them. Had not we better be returning homeward, darling?"

"Not yet, not yet," pleaded Philippa, "stay a little longer—it is so lovely here; the moon is rising so gloriously over the hills, and—and when once we are in the house we must be on our hypocritically good behaviour—you don't seem to belong to me at all. We must say 'Good night;'

you will shake hands and part with me exactly as you part with Kate."

"Not exactly," he answered; "I don't think that even the most prudish regulations would deny me a kiss from my betrothed."

"Well, and you'll kiss Kate too?"

"That does not follow as a necessary consequence," he answered; "I'm not in the habit of kissing everybody."

"She is not everybody," said Philippa; "I quite consider her as a sort of sister of yours."

"I don't object to that," rejoined Jasper, "she was always rather a pet of mine; but please, Philippa, don't consider Joe Atherton as a sort of a brother."

"Why? don't you like him?" she asked.

"Because he is a sneak," replied Jasper, with darkening brow; "he would play me false even in my own home if he dared."

But never mind him, let us talk about ourselves; we have not too long a time to be together. We *must* turn homeward now, dear; I have got many matters to settle and talk over with my father before he goes to bed."

"Can't you leave them till to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, darling! I leave by the eight o'clock train, there is no time to lose; the vessel starts at twelve that night."

"So soon, so soon!" exclaimed Philippa, with a scared look.

"Soon indeed," he answered; "but I think short warnings and brief partings are best. If I were to remain here for another month we should be looking forward to the coming hour with dread, and should feel the wrench at parting *then* as much as *now*. In spite of all the preparations we make for coming evils we

are never really prepared, they always take us by surprise at last. We feel as keenly as though we had never expected them at all."

"I dare say you are right," rejoined Philippa, gulping down the rising sobs.

"Think of the joy of my return, Queenie, and that will dull the pain of parting," said Jasper.

"And—and you really wish me to stay here?" said Philippa.

"My father desires it, darling," answered Jasper; "besides, where else could you go? How could I go away and leave you, a young beautiful woman, alone in London?"

"I could go home to Great Marylebone Street to papa and Martha," suggested Philippa.

"Your father is no protector to you, Queenie, you know that," answered Jasper;

“and your incomparable friend Martha is not exactly the guardian or companion I should choose for my wife, for you know I was always inclined to be a little jealous of Martha.” His bright smile as he ended took the sting out of the other portion of his speech.

“But I may go up to town with you to-morrow,” said Philippa; “I can sleep at home—at Martha’s, I mean—and tell them all the arrangements we have made, and I can return here the next day.”

He could not resist the earnest pleading of her upturned face, and he answered, half hesitatingly—

“Well, yes, dear; there will be a little awkwardness about it, but it shall be done.”

“What awkwardness can there be in the matter?” asked Philippa.

“Why, in the first place that ape Joe

Atherton will think it only properly respectful to go up with us and escort you back here the next day ; in that case you could hardly avoid introducing him to your father, and I should not choose Joseph Atherton to pry into the mysteries of Great Marylebone Street. The curtain has fallen over that portion of your hard life, my noble, glorious girl, and I would not have it lifted by his hand. Besides—I don't mean to be disrespectful to your father, dear—but you know the dear old gentleman is getting a little feeble in his mind occasionally, and he might try to borrow money of Joe, and that would be fine nuts to crack at Brantynham."

"Poor papa!" sighed Philippa, softly, "I know he is a little indiscreet sometimes. What a dreadful thing it is to be poor ; if he only lived in a large house, with a good account at his bankers, he might beg,

borrow, or steal, and nobody would say anything about it. Of course it is quite impossible that Mr. Atherton can go up with us; but can you not manage so that we two go alone?"

"Certainly I'll manage it; rest assured of that," he said. "But see, the lights from the Hall windows are gleaming through the trees; we are close at home. And now one kiss, darling—another—and then good night. Our next good night will be a formality for other eyes to witness—this is our own true good night." He held her in his arms and kissed her again and again; then, silent and absorbed, they went back to the old Hall under the shadow of the darkening night.

Jasper got severely rated for keeping Philippa out when the heavy dew was falling. His father had asked for him more than once; he had many things to say to

him, many directions to give him before he started on his unexpected journey. Accordingly, after a brief good night all round and a lingering glance and gentle pressure of Philippa's hand, he went up to his father's room, and spent a great part of the night at his bedside.

Mrs. Brantynham suggested that Miss Maitland must be tired with her journey, and would like to go to bed at once; or would she play a game at *bézi*que?

Philippa declined *bézi*que and preferred going to bed, mildly suggesting that she must rise very early in the morning, as she intended to go up to town with Jasper, and would return to Brantynham the next day. She did not wait to hear the astonishment her words created, but with a smiling good night to Mrs. Brantynham and Mr. Atherton, with a kiss for Kate, she beat a hasty retreat from the room.

Philippa rose early the next morning, and was out in the garden long before the rest of the household was astir. She had not been very long enjoying the sweet morning air, when Jasper, as though guided by some mesmeric influence, joined her there, and they met like lovers who had been parted for days, instead of the brief dark hours of the night. After the first few minutes had passed, he said—

“There is one thing which I forgot to say to you last evening, darling: it is about our marriage. You have been most generous and kind to do as you have done, but I don’t quite like leaving you in this position. My father, dear old man, has just now a matter of such weighty importance to digest, that perhaps if I were to throw in this one bitter pill with a little gilding he might take it more kindly and with less

ill effects than I at first anticipated. What do you think about it?"

"I think I would not have you tell him for all the world," replied Philippa, earnestly. "This is not the time, when he is agitated with one matter to anger him with another. The first plunge is over, and I would rather things remain as they are till you return."

"Thank you, darling, so would I," he answered, heartily; "it was only for your sake I would have spoken."

They sauntered on talking lovingly, exacting and giving promises of mutual love and faith, setting certain times to think of one another and send sweet silent messages across the sea, when the breakfast bell summoned them to the house.

There was no loitering, no idling away of time over this pleasant and generally sociable meal; it was got through hastily, with a few

passing snatches of conversation and a few decided suggestions concerning the train by which Philippa was to return the next day, in order that the carriage should be there to meet her. The basket-chaise, which Jasper was to drive to the station, rolled rapidly to the door, and the two travellers started on their journey. It was to be a brief journey for the one, but a long and wearying one for the other.

At nine o'clock that evening Mr. Maitland, Philippa, and Jasper Brantynham stood on the dimly-lighted platform of the Waterloo Station, waiting for the train to start which was to bear Jasper away for three long months. That would be the shortest time of his absence, but which circumstances, however, might lengthen far into the distant future, as nothing in this world is certain but uncertainty.

The old man sat upon a bench staring

vacantly about him, while the young husband and wife paced slowly up and down, whispering those last loving words which are so little in themselves, yet mean so much. The crowd came sweeping along the platform, the train was filling fast, the bell was ringing to warn tardy loiterers to hasten or they would be too late. Jasper was compelled to take his seat, Philippa stood close by, her hand upon the door, and his hand with a gentle pressure lay on hers; he leaned forward, and his eyes rested tenderly on her tearless face.

The compartment was full of strangers, so no more last words were spoken between them. Philippa was warned back, the guard came along the platform, slamming the doors by the way. He waved his green flag, and with a shrill scream the train moved slowly out of the station. "Good-bye," burst simultaneously from their lips.

Philippa stood there watching the iron monster till its great fiery eye was lost in the darkening distance. Then she went to her father's side. A great sob rose in her throat, half stifling her as she said, "I am ready, papa; take me home."






CHAPTER VIII.

PASSIONATE MADNESS.

FASPER had been gone some weeks, Philippa had returned to Brantynham according to the arrangement that she should remain there till his return. Everyone was very kind to her, and treated her with the respect due to the future mistress of the house. She saw but little of Mr. Brantynham; he had been almost entirely confined to his bed since his son's departure. More than once Philippa had volunteered to sit with him, to read to him, and take her share in the task of interesting and amusing the old man; but Mrs. Brantynham led her to believe that her at-

tentions would not be pleasing to him, as he liked to have the society of those to whom he was accustomed, or else to be left alone.

Philippa was sorry. She would have been so happy to feel she was being of use to Jasper's father. She would then have had something to do, something to cling to, during his absence. She did not feel offended or aggrieved at her kind offices being rejected, as rejected they were, though the rejection was couched in somewhat ambiguous gentle terms. It was quite natural, she thought, that the old man should prefer the society of his wife and step-daughter to hers, as she was almost a stranger to him. She knew nothing of the terms on which the family lived together. They might have been the most devoted in the universe for aught she could judge to the contrary; any little hitch which there



might be in the social machinery was hidden from her sight, and as Jasper had never hinted at the existence of the skeleton in the house she never sought for it.

On the whole she was tolerably happy and contented; more so indeed than she had at first anticipated. She could not, however, make herself quite at home: she felt she was with them, but not of them. There was no congeniality in their natures. Her heart had gone out warmly to Kate at the first hour of their meeting, and Kate had as warmly responded, but then and there their mutual attraction towards each other ceased; it developed into no keener interest, no further knowledge of character, except so far as was exemplified on the surface. They were perfectly good friends, always courteous and willing to oblige each other in great things or small, called each other by their Christian names, walked and talked

a great deal together, and yet were never intimate; and though they had spent these ten days together, they were no nearer to each other's affections than on the first day they met.

Concerning Mrs. Brantynham, Philippa frequently debated within herself whether she liked that lady or not. She was always scrupulously attentive to her wants and wishes, were they ever so slightly expressed. There was nothing tangible either in her looks, words, or actions that Philippa could lay hold of and say, "I don't like this" or "I don't like that." She reproached herself for not being sufficiently grateful to Mrs. Brantynham, and she could not long conceal from herself the fact that she was afflicted with a general shrinking-away feeling from Mrs. Brantynham, for which she could find no name. She combated against it, but it grew hour by hour and

day by day. She found a name and a cause for it at last. In spite, however, of the kind attentions of those around her, amid the calm luxurious life at Brantynham, which contrasted so strongly with the days and months of anxious labour which had gone before, she often yearned for the poor feeble old father's half-childish love, and for Martha's fresh invigorating affection.

Joseph Atherton, against whom she was conscious of encouraging a slight feeling of prejudice, grafted perhaps upon Jasper's ill-concealed dislike, did his utmost to make life pleasant to her; in fact he was her bounden slave, and held himself always ready at her command. He had given her riding lessons from the first day of her return, and before the week was over she was able to sit her horse well, and manage it with an easy graceful dexterity which would have put to shame the undignified

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awkwardness with which some ladies go bumping through their equestrian exercises. Before he arranged his daily duties he consulted her. Would she like to canter over the hills? or should they row down the river? or drive over to the mead and have a day's fishing? Sometimes she declined all his kind offers, and she and Kate would go down to the village and busy themselves with the school children, or enjoy a day's visiting among the poor cottagers, seeing how the world went with their humbler neighbours and helping them when they could.

The family at Brantynham Hall seemed to think it an imperative duty that one or other of them should always keep Philippa company, so that she never had an hour to herself, and this constant state of surveillance (for such she felt it to be) became irksome, and soon unendurable. Taking advantage of the slightest oppor-

tunity, she would steal out of the house and wander away for a solitary ramble. But it generally happened that on these occasions she was joined by Joseph Atherton before she got far from the house. He did not oppress her much with his conversation, but seemed content to walk silently by her side, now stooping to gather such wild flowers as lingered in the fields and hedges, putting them together and arranging their colours till they formed a tasteful bouquet, which he presented to her, and she accepted with a smiling "Thank you." Sometimes he stretched a hand to help her over a stile, or to rescue her dress from an attack of briars and brambles, or to do any of those small offices which may make a ramble pleasant when we choose our companion. But Philippa had no choice, she could not without palpable rudeness decline the companionship which he forced on her; besides,

she was compelled to remember that she was only a guest in his mother's house, although she was the affianced bride of the heir. More than once during these quiet strolls she looked up suddenly and found his eyes fixed intently upon her, with a side-long half-veiled glance, which sent the colour to her cheeks, made her quicken her steps, and turn her face away. At last she grew so nervous and uncomfortable that she gave up these rambles altogether. One day he took her to task upon the subject and inquired why she had given up walking, and when would she let him escort her through the woods again? She answered him truthfully, though in a pleasant laughing way.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Atherton, I don't think I am of a particularly sociable disposition; indeed I am rather a solitary bird, and enjoy my rambles best alone."

“Which means you enjoy it most without my company,” he said, and his eyes glowed like burning coals as he fixed them on her face.

“Now you are trying to tempt me to say impolite things, and I don’t mean to be tempted,” she answered, laughing.

He laid his hand on hers and looked intently on her face, as he rejoined, without answering her—

“Why do you wish to deprive me of the one great pleasure of my life? the only pleasure I enjoy now!”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Philippa, becoming embarrassed and uncomfortable under his close scrutiny. “What pleasure can it possibly be to you to walk grim and silent as a ghost beside a girl who does not take the trouble to make herself agreeable to you, and,” she added, hastily, “who

has no desire that you should make yourself agreeable to her."

"That's all the thanks a man gets for making a fool of himself for a woman's sake," he said, and there was a sullen bitterness in his tone which contrasted with the gleaming fire in his eyes.

"Which only proves that women don't appreciate folly," she answered, still taking him in a light pleasant fashion, though she felt ill at ease.

"Ay, it is folly, I suppose," he answered gloomily; "but do you know Miss Maitland, I would rather walk by your side straight away to Hell, than mount on an angel's wings to Heaven."

"Now your talk is growing wicked as well as foolish," said Philippa, with angry impatience; "for shame! Mr. Atherton, to-morrow you will be ashamed of yourself for talking as you are talking now!"

“I never have been, I never shall be ashamed of anything,” he answered. “I have never seen much of ladies, Philippa (you may frown, I will call you Philippa, you cannot prevent me). I have been working here on this estate for Jasper’s benefit all my life. My mother and sister have been my only friends and companions, with the exception of the labouring population of this place whose charms are not especially striking. I have seen little of women, and the sight of your beauty is too much for me. I am losing my head. The world seems full of shadows and you are the only living, breathing substance in it! When I first set my eyes upon you, ten days ago—ten days! Oh, God! it seems ten years!—my soul quickened with a new life, which has grown stronger day by day and hour by hour, till it has killed everything but itself. I wonder how I have lived

for twenty-eight years and have never felt the love of a woman's face till now, and to think that the face, which was to bring my doom should be *yours*! I never sleep, I scarcely eat or drink; the thought of you so fills me. At night, when all the house is still, I go out and walk beneath your darkened window, I shut my eyes and send my soul to look at you while you are sleeping, and I wonder how you can sleep so quietly above, while I am going mad for love of you below."

Philippa with a sort of shrinking fear in her eyes had remained mute from terror. She neither attempted to stir or speak. She seemed rooted to the spot, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. At first she was too bewildered to understand him. Now, as he paused for a second, she found courage to say, though in a low half-breathless voice—

“Why do you say these things to me? How do you dare to speak in this wild reckless way to *me*, when you know I am—am almost Jasper’s wife? Oh, why did he leave me, why did he leave me!” she added, losing all nerve as she wrung her hands and burst into a flood of tears.

“Why! ah, why indeed,” repeated Joseph Atherton, catching eagerly at her words. “I would have been torn to pieces first; I would have let fifty uncles die—fifty estates be lost, rather than have left the woman I loved, or the woman who loved me. Why did he go indeed?” he repeated the words with a sneer upon his lips.

Philippa, stung with a jealous pang for Jasper’s sake, answered angrily—

“He went because I wished him to go, I would not for the world have had him stay. He went for another reason too, because he

loved his duty better than he loved himself”

“And because inclination and duty jumped together,” rejoined Joseph Atherton, a feeling of jealous rage kindling in his eyes. The glow that lighted Philippa’s face as she spoke of Jasper, revealed the fulness of her devoted love and lashed his passion to white heat; he lost all self-control, all considerations of prudence. He only felt that this woman, whom he loved, loved the man he hated; and he struck, with his cruel words, blindly and with a desire to reach the root of that love, and if he could not destroy, to graft upon it bitterness as he added—“He went because he had not the courage to face out his own doings—he could not live in the constant sight of you two girls, the one he has deceived and jilted, the other he has chosen—he should have been the husband of my sister Kate.

I forgive him, though ; I would forgive any man anything he did for your sake—yours is just the face to fool or drive men mad—I feel that. Philippa,” he added, seizing her hand and retaining it, in spite of the horror that was written on her face, “*he* cannot love you as I do ; he has frittered away his milk-and-water affections on twenty women, *I* concentrate mine on *you*. Why should his cup be filled to overflowing, while I am thirsting for a drop. He has wealth—position—love, why should he be preferred in all these things to me?”

“Because *he* is as good and noble as *you* are base and infamous,” exclaimed Philippa, with almost breathless indignation. “You mean coward, to heap your lying slanders on a man who is a thousand miles distant, and to slander him to *me* when you know I love him.”

"I have told no lie, no slander; what I have said is true," rejoined Joseph Atherton.

"All the worse, and you are all the more cruel to reveal to me what he, in mercy, has concealed," exclaimed Philippa. "It is nothing to me whom he has loved, or why he has loved. I do not suppose that he, or any man, walks through the world blindfolded—unloving and unloved for thirty years. His past is nothing to me, his present is mine, and I know that he loves *me* now, and the slime of your poisonous lips has no power to taint my love for him."

"And I have only spoken in my love for you," rejoined Joseph Atherton. "You will live to find out that this idol of yours is but a creature of clay—common clay, too—the man who is false to one woman, is seldom true to another."

“Joseph Atherton,” exclaimed Philippa, impulsively, “I hate you, and I shall hate you to the end of my life. If Jasper Brantynham had been false to fifty women, I should still hate you for making known the fact to *me*; but mind I do not believe a word you have said; not *one*,” she added emphatically. “You have acted with a fool’s wisdom, if you thought to advance yourself by depreciating him. If we ever find a blemish in those we love, we try to hide it from ourselves; when a meddler takes the trouble to point it out, we do not thank him, we hate him for his pains. I will go home at once, I will not stay another day in the same house with you. I shall write to Jasper and tell him why, and by whom, I have been driven from his father’s roof.”

Joseph Atherton had drooped his head upon his hand while she was speaking, and

remained still and motionless; never stirring to interrupt her by word, look, or gesture. The deep scorn which was written on her face, seemed to have stopped the flow of his malicious eloquence and cowed his spirit; he awoke to the full consciousness of his folly in allowing his temper to get the better of his judgment. His mad passion and jealous wrath had carried him further than he meant to go, and he now dreaded the consequence of his rashness. He lifted his head; his face was haggard and pale now, all the fierce passion seemed to have died out of it. Philippa had risen up and was sweeping across the room towards the door, when the changed expression of his face, and an imploring gesture he made, arrested her steps. He passed his hand over his forehead in a lost bewildered sort of way, as he said—

“Stay, Miss Maitland, please, a moment

longer. I am afraid I have been talking wildly—saying things I should not have said—I—I ought to have controlled my tongue better. Will you forgive me, and think I was afflicted with a momentary madness?—do try and forget it.”

“It was madness indeed,” she rejoined; “but there was a method in it, and I hope you will never have a renewal of the attack; the evil thoughts and feelings must have been borne in your mind, or they could never have escaped from your tongue. You have insulted me and slandered *him*.”

“I spoke the truth,” he said, interrupting her quickly; “and all the village knows it.”

“No matter if it were ten times true, you ought never to have told it—least of all to me,” she spoke with an assumption of calm dignity that was strangely at variance

with the wild beating of her heart, but he only heard her words and saw her face. "No, don't go back to the matter," she added, fancying he was about to speak. "I will hear of Jasper's follies or Jasper's sins only from Jasper's self. There is no need for us two ever to speak again. I shall leave Brantynham, but you shall not be involved in the matter; I will give no other reason for going but a woman's wilful will."

"No, Miss Maitland," he exclaimed anxiously, "you will stay, I entreat you. *I* am going away to-morrow for a few days; when I return I shall be more calm, and you may incline to be generous and forgive the folly—the mad folly, if you will—that was born of my love for you."

"Love," she repeated, with a glance of bitter contempt upon her face; "don't

clothe your infamous feeling by so pure a name."

Without heeding her interruption he continued, urging her for many reasons to remain, adding in conclusion, "Say that you will try to forget what has passed this hour, and I will promise that when I return I will make no attempt to renew the subject."

"When you return here, I will engage you shall have no opportunity for renewing it," replied Philippa, emphatically. "I will remain at Brantynham only on one condition, perhaps, I should say, on many conditions. I will have you swear never to lift your eyes to mine—never to interrupt me in my walks, or if we meet by chance, to avoid me as though I were a rattlesnake in your path—or if chance should leave us alone, either in the house or out of it, even for a single moment, you will be dumb and

never dare to open your lips to me. On these conditions only will I consent to remain at Brantynham Hall, and be silent on what you are pleased to call your folly."

"You stand on the vantage-ground, and can impose your own conditions," he said, sullenly; "they are hard, and"—he looked in her face, and saw there was no chance of her changing her mind or softening her decree, so he added with a deep-drawn breath—"Well, I swear things shall be as you desire. Another word——"

"No—not one—no more, I could not bear it," she said, wearily, as she lifted her hand to her head and left the room with a pale face and nerves sorely shaken.

As she passed up the stairs Mrs. Brantynham caught sight of her, and noticed her listless walk and changed countenance. She was hurrying forward to know what

was the matter, when she encountered her son Joseph in the corridor, following, as it seemed, in Philippa's footsteps, with his eyes downcast and his face haggard and white. She laid her hand upon his arm, drew him into the room, and closed the door behind her.

"Well," she asked, in a low voice, as she scrutinized his face, "what is the matter? what is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning, mother, simply is that I have made a fool of myself," he answered, grimly; "and for the last half-hour I have been changed from the staid, careful steward of the Brantynham estates to a gibbering idiot."

"You have been talking to *her*," rejoined Mrs. Brantynham, emphatically pointing the way Philippa had gone. "I saw what things were coming to, and I gave you warning."

"Warning!" he echoed; "has a warning ever yet saved a man from wrecking his life for a woman's love?"

"I don't know about wrecking his life," exclaimed Mrs. Brantynham, "but I think you are running the risk of wrecking your fortune—ours, too—by this foolish fancy of yours; and all for no good. The girl would never cast her eyes on *you*! She has secured the heir; it is not likely she would throw him off for the steward—for though you are my son, that is the real relationship in which you stand to Jasper Brantynham."

"Curse him!" exclaimed Joseph Ather-ton; "it is hard. Is he to have all the fortune! The man I hate to marry the woman I love! Can you do nothing, mother—can you do nothing for me? Think!"

Mrs. Brantynham shook her head.

"Nothing," she answered. "If Kate

had played her cards well, things would have been different. Nothing I could say or do would have any effect, so far as you are concerned. It is bad enough for her to marry Jasper; it would be ruin for her to marry you. What would become of us all if you were burdened with a penniless wife?"

"I don't see why Kate should not have a chance still," said Joseph Atherton, gloomily, ignoring the latter part of her sentence. "There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. A hasty engagement, as this of Jasper's seems to be, is not warranted to last. Something might be done."

"Tell me what, and I'll do it," replied his mother. "At one time, I know, Jasper was on the verge of proposing to Kate; he did all that a man could do, and went as far as a man could go without absolutely making an offer. By some unfortunate

chance this girl's face came between them, or all would have been well. I would do anything in the world, Joe," she added, "to break off the match with Jasper; but I would do just as much to keep her apart from *you*. We are too poor to allow you to indulge in any sickly love follies."

"Fate is fate, mother," he answered, "and I feel that I am facing mine at last. But I am going to turn my back upon it for a time. I feel hipped, I want a change; I shall go up to town for a day or two."

"The best thing you can do," she answered. "Go, by all means, and leave everything here to me?"

"What excuse can I make to Mr. Brantynham?"

"I don't know that any excuse will be needed," she answered; "he seldom asks for you, and when he does he is easily satisfied. What he asks for one minute he for-

gets the next; in some moods it is easy to persuade him to anything."

Mother and son parted after some further slight discussion on the one subject, filled with anxieties, and hopes, and fears which their tongues had not dared to utter to one another.

Mrs. Brantynham was unnerved by her son's mad folly. She had watched the symptoms developing hour by hour, but with all her boasted knowledge of human nature, she had never calculated how far it would carry him. Joseph Atherton was by nature a cool, phlegmatic man, full of low cunning. He had lived a solitary, brooding, unsatisfactory life till fate brought Philippa to Brantynham Hall. Love had not grown from the daily knowledge of her—it had sprung to life at the first sight of her. He put no curb upon his feelings, nor tried to restrain them in any way, although

he knew she was sealed to another. He loved her with a wild, absorbing love which gave a quietus to reason, and burned the more fiercely from its utter hopelessness.

There was no refinement, no delicacy in his feeling for Philippa. His love was not that pure passion which prefers the happiness of its object to its own success. He would rather have made her wretched than any other man should have made her happy.

So, girded about with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, he turned his back on Brantynham Hall, and for a few brief days buried himself in the whirl of London life.



CHAPTER IX.

SELF-TORTURE.

THE very morning that Joseph Atherton was to start for London, the Indian Mail came in, and brought a letter for Miss Maitland. The rapturous look which sprang to her eyes as she stretched out her hand to receive it, smote Mrs. Brantynham's son with a Cain-like feeling of envy, and with that feeling in his heart he departed.

Jasper had written this letter to Philippa on the very day of his arrival in Calcutta, consequently it was brief and hurried, and simply told her he was safe and well, having had a most enjoyable passage over. He had found his relative seriously ill, but not

in present danger. Affairs there seemed to be a "mass of confusion," the letter stated, "and it would take some time to set them right. He would write again soon, meanwhile, for his sake she was to care well for herself," and it wound up with the tenderest expressions of affection that can be well conceived.

Philippa was radiant for the moment, and for many moments afterwards; but as she looked up and found Kate's quiet inquiring eyes fixed upon her, Joseph Atherton's assertion came to her mind with a bitter pang. Was there any truth in it? She had always thought of Jasper as so exclusively *hers*, that it had never crossed her mind he could ever have belonged to any one else, till Mr. Atherton had presented the unpleasant idea to her; after all, she thought, he and Kate had been so much together, it was not only possible but even

probable that an attachment had sprung up between them, perhaps an engagement. Why was it broken off? "For my sake," thought Philippa, "for me;" and she found herself vaguely speculating as to the sort of love he would feel for Kate; whether it was the same he gave to her, or if it differed in degree or quality. The more she pondered and thought, the more perplexed and pained she was at the aspect of affairs. She could not help regretting deeply her own shortsightedness in ignoring her wifhood and coming to Jasper's father's house simply as his betrothed. She began to see the awkward complications which might arise from the false position she had assumed. She had not the courage to take upon herself the task of explaining matters, feeling Jasper would not approve of any confidential communications between her and Mrs. Brantynham; besides, she was not inclined

to make them, there was no affinity of spirit between her and any member of the family; nothing to draw her towards them. She very rarely saw Mr. Brantynham, and then only for a few minutes in the presence of other people, when they exchanged a few commonplace kindly words; sometimes he was not able to speak at all. Then she consoled herself with the thought of Jasper's return; when he came back all would be well.

That very morning when she had received Jasper's letter she sat down to write an answer to it, in which she led him to believe she was very happy at Brantynham Hall, and had only one thing to regret, his absence. She gave him all the little bits of home gossip which she thought he would like to hear, but took care to touch on nothing likely to disturb or vex him. As it was a bright sunny day she thought she should like to walk down to the Post

Office, and post the precious document herself. As she prepared to start, she encountered Mrs. Brantynham upon the stairs. Hearing on what errand she was bent, Mrs. Brantynham shook her head, saying—

“My dear child, that will never do. It is a full mile and a half to the Post Office. Far too fatiguing a walk under this warm sun.”

“But I shall like it,” replied Philippa, eagerly; “indeed Mrs. Brantynham I shall enjoy the walk. I require a great deal of exercise, more than I have been taking lately.”

“Of course, my dear Philippa, you can take as much exercise as you like in our own grounds; but I really cannot allow you to be walking about the village alone, it is not proper. And I know Jasper is very particular—at least he used to be—about the

conduct of ladies, and I am sure he would disapprove of it ; and I, for my part, would not allow Kate to be wandering about the lanes alone. And you know, my dear, I consider you as my other daughter. Cannot you put your letter in the post-bag and let it go with the rest ?”

“The post-bag has gone half an hour ago,” said Philippa, disappointedly ; “besides, I wanted to post this myself.”

“Very well,” replied Mrs. Brantynham, goodnaturedly, “then I’ll order the pony carriage round and drive you there myself. No, don’t thank me, my dear, it is always a great pleasure to do anything for you.”

All this was certainly very kind, but somehow, Philippa did not appreciate the kindness ; she felt it was an interference, a sort of rule over her, which chafed her spirit. Her old independence was gone, she could no longer move hither or thither

as she pleased. Some invisible surveillance seemed always over her.

The basket-chaise, with the steady old pony Topsy was at the door. The two ladies seated themselves, Mrs. Brantynham took the whip and drove off, chatting pleasantly by the way.

On reaching the village Philippa got out and went into the office to speak to the postmaster, or rather postmistress, for the office was kept by a widow and two daughters. She made the most minute inquiries respecting the mails, when they came in and when they went out: all which she might have learnt from the newspapers, but she liked to get her information on this important matter by word of mouth. She got the stamp, slipped her letter into the box, and then returned to the chaise.

“By the bye, my dear,” said Mrs. Brantynham, “if you will just hold the reins for

a moment I will speak to Mrs. Webb. There has been some unpunctuality in the arrival of the post-bag at the Hall lately, and I think it should be looked to."

She went into the office and remained there some little time, while Philippa sat quietly in the chaise, preoccupied with her own thoughts, and whisking the troublesome flies off the pony's ears, quite unconscious that she was an object of remark, or that three female faces were scrutinizing her from the office window, while Mrs. Brantynham stood back in shadow. Presently she came out, reseated herself by Philippa's side, and drove slowly home. Although there was a satisfied smile upon her face, yet she was more silent and abstracted on the way back to the Hall than she had been when they left it.

In the afternoon of that same day Doctor

Latham drove over to see his patient, accompanied by his wife, who was most anxious to pay her compliments to Miss Maitland, to whom she was introduced in due form, and while Dr. Latham was closeted with Mr. Brantynham, Mrs. Latham was left to enjoy a tête-à-tête with the ladies, which would have been as milk-and-watery and flavourless as those morning-call tête-à-têtes generally are, if Mrs. Latham had not managed to infuse into it a little aromatic essence of social scandal.

They discussed the births, deaths, and marriages that had taken place during the last six months. The ladies evidently did not often meet, and had a great many matters to discuss when they did. Mrs. Brantynham made some seeming chance allusion to a Miss Broderip, a very pretty girl, it appeared, who had resided in a distant part of the county, and concerning

whom some strange rumours had reached Brantynham Hall. Mrs. Latham was ready primed for the occasion, and being full of information on the subject, she let it flow freely to the ears of her friends.

“Miss Broderip,” she said, “well, that is an extraordinary affair; but you know there is no Miss Broderip now, she is Mrs. Vantysell.”

“It is rather a romantic story, I believe,” remarked Mrs. Brantynham, inquisitively. “I did not know she was married, though I heard something of an engagement.”

“Oh, well, you know, it has been quite the talk of the county,” replied Mrs. Latham. “Mr. Vantysell is very rich, and would have been a splendid match for any lady in the county. But then, no well-bred lady will stoop to angle for a husband. And the way some pretty-faced penniless girls spread their nets to catch unsuspect-

ing foolish men is absolutely disgraceful. As for Fanny Broderip, she positively hunted the man down till he was compelled to propose to her in self-defence. But no good ever comes of such manœuvring ways. We only see the beginning, no one sees the end. People say she is a very fortunate girl; but there are two sides to every question."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," rejoined Mrs. Brantynham; "an ill-assorted marriage is always an unhappy one."

"But can you call any marriage *ill* assorted when people love one another?" Philippa ventured to say, softly.

"Oh, love is all very well as far as it goes!" replied Mrs. Brantynham, "but when there are inequalities either in rank, position, circumstances or money, love soon finds its level—a man soon learns to despise the woman who has entrapped him. I am

sure," she added, turning smilingly to Philippa, "we ought to congratulate ourselves that our dear Jasper is so well disposed of. There is no longer a fear of his disgracing his family by bringing home a female adventuress."

"Had you ever a fear of that?" said Philippa, lifting her superb proud eyes to Mrs. Brantynham's face.

"No, my dear, not exactly a fear," she answered; "Jasper had always a full share of proper pride, but men are weak and we never know into what folly the very best of them may fall."

The devil will sometimes quote Scripture for his own ends, and while Mrs. Brantynham was speaking, she quite forgot the time when she—herself an adventuress—had spread such snares for poor Mr. Brantynham's unwary feet, and that she and her children had fattened on his land,

and fastened their lives upon him. But it is always easy to forget those things which we don't wish to remember. As Mrs. Brantynham finished speaking, Kate came in with a message that her mother's presence was required in the sick room, and excusing herself to her visitor she went at once. The conversation, so interrupted, soon flagged; then something was said about the garden, and Mrs. Latham made some inquiry as to the progress of some slight alterations which were being made in the vinery and in the garden. Kate was tired, she had been walking about half the day, she said, "But if Mrs. Latham would like to go over the grounds and inspect the alterations herself, she was quite sure dear Philippa would accompany her." Of course, Philippa was very happy to do so, and the two passed out together. As they walked along the conversation turned, as

naturally it would, to the many attractions of Brantynham, and Mrs. Latham was very earnest in her regret at the protracted illness of its owner, adding sympathetically—

“These long illnesses are very trying; but we must have patience—patience—we know it must be all over soon,” she paused a moment, gazing at the stately figure beside her, before she added, “What a charming mistress of Brantynham Hall you will make, Miss Maitland.”

“I am in no hurry to be mistress of Brantynham Hall,” Philippa answered hastily; “indeed, so far as I am concerned, I hope it will be a long long time before it is ‘all over.’ It is a horrible thing to calculate on the death of a living man.”

“I don’t know about its being very horrible,” rejoined Mrs. Latham, with a slight shrug of her shoulders; “but I

think it is very natural that the heir of a man should have a longing for his inheritance."

"Bad things are only natural to bad natures," replied Philippa, "and I am quite sure that Jasper would never grudge his father one hour of his life. When he dies there will be no sincerer mourner at his grave than his son and heir. I have often heard," she added, smiling, "that a man rarely looks with kindly eyes upon his successor, and I am not surprised if it is a case of watched and watcher. It must always be with a painful feeling one steps into a dead man's shoes."

"Stepping into a living woman's shoes is rather a different thing," said Mrs. Latham with a significant arch look on Philippa's face. "You will excuse me, I know, but I cannot resist my joke on that subject."

“Well, I suppose there must be a joke somewhere,” said Philippa, vaguely; “but really I don’t understand it.”

“Ah!” rejoined Mrs. Latham, shaking her head, “it is no use putting on those superlative innocent looks before *me*. I am a woman of the world, and I see beneath the surface. I am sure Jasper has told you all about it, and I am quite surprised to see you get on so well together, though it must be a great satisfaction to all parties concerned. She is a very noble character, dear girl; but it is not often that one woman consents to be on friendly terms with another who has supplanted her.”

“What *do* you mean?” exclaimed Philippa, stopping suddenly and standing still; “you speak in such indefinite terms, you might as well be talking in an unknown tongue for what I can understand of your

meaning or your object in speaking in those strange terms to me."

"I am generally notorious for plain speaking," replied Mrs. Latham, "but is it really a fact that I have mystified you so entirely. I fancied you must know all about it, or I would not have spoken at all; but I must say, I think Jasper ought to have told you. It is never well to begin life with a skeleton hidden away in a corner; it is sure to find its way out and rattle its bones in your face one day."

"Please introduce me to the skeleton without farther ceremony, that is if it has any existence—it may be a mere ghost of your own imagination," said Philippa.

"Well, no," replied Mrs. Latham, reflectively, "on second thoughts, I think we had better let the matter drop."

"They will drive me mad among them,"

muttered Philippa under her breath; then she added aloud, "No, we cannot let the matter drop now, you have said either too much or too little—you have stirred up a suspicion of Jasper's honour—you accuse him of breaking faith with a lady whom I have supplanted. What ground have you for such a charge? I will know whom it is you allude to."

"As I told you before, I am very sorry I spoke of this subject at all," rejoined Mrs. Latham; "it is unfortunate that our conversation drifted that way. I never meant to let the cat out of the bag, and I hope I have done no harm."

"The truth is never harmful—tell it me," said Philippa.

"I must say, Miss Maitland, I think you take the matter too seriously—I never meant to cast a slur upon dear Jasper's honour. I love him too well, dear fellow,

we have always been the very best of friends up to this time, and now that I have seen you, I shall be better able to excuse *him*; but when you talk of supplanting it is foolish, because one woman always does supplant another, and dear Kate I consider bears it well."

"Oh," exclaimed Philippa, interrupting her quickly, "it is Miss Atherton you allude to."

"Exactly! this of course is quite a secret between us," rejoined Mrs. Latham; "we all expected the marriage would come off in the early spring, even when he was down here six weeks ago. I spoke to him on the matter—and I must say he fenced with me very cleverly—the cunning rogue. It was a very desperate attachment on both sides I know, at one time; but men's affections sometimes cool down very fast. At any rate it is a glorious triumph for *you*."

An expression of a sudden acute pain contracted Philippa's face, she put her hands up to her ears as she said—

“Don't, please don't, say that. Triumph! call it a shame, a misfortune to tread, even with unconscious feet, upon a woman's heart and steal away her love. Poor Kate, how she must hate me! poor, poor Kate.” She hung her head, and her voice was full of sympathetic tears. She walked on silently and quickly. A cloud darkened the face of the sun, and at that moment it seemed as though all the sunlight had died out of the skies, out of her life, and would never come back again. Mrs. Latham quickened her steps and came up with her, saying—

“My dear Miss Maitland, you need not waste any pretty romantic remorse, we all have to get over these things; never fear she will live it down. I'm sorry you are so

upset. It seems to me an extraordinary thing for a girl to take on so about such a very successful affair; *you* are not forsaken, *you* have nothing to regret. But we are a long way from the house, hadn't we better go back?"

"Yes," said Philippa, as she turned to retrace her steps. Mrs. Latham walked by her side, letting her tongue run loosely from one thing to another; but Philippa paid no heed and never answered her a word. When they got within sight of the house, she pointed to the direct pathway, and said,

"Excuse me, will you? you can find your way now, and I—I cannot go in to talk to them yet."

Mrs. Latham was quite willing to excuse her, they shook hands, said "Good-bye," and she congratulated herself warmly upon having had the pleasure of making "dear

Miss Maitland's acquaintance, and when she became mistress of Brantynham Hall she was quite sure they would be the warmest and best of friends." So meandering on, she stood at the open door, and on looking back she found that Philippa was already some paces distant, and she stood there watching till her light skirts fluttered away and were lost among the thick growing shrubs, then turning to enter the house she met Mrs. Brantynham, who greeted her, saying,

"I hope you have enjoyed your ramble and approve of what we are doing; but," she added, looking, "surely you have not been alone, I thought Miss Maitland went with you."

"She went with me certainly," replied Mrs. Latham, "and brought me back so far; but we have just said 'Good-bye,' she would not come into the house, and has gone wan-

dering away in the most flighty manner. My dear Mrs. Brantynham," she added, lifting her eyes to that lady's face in mysterious wonderment, "she seems to be a most extraordinary young person, utterly deficient in good breeding, unless indeed there is something wrong here," and she tapped her forehead significantly.

"She is certainly sometimes odd in her ways, but it is our duty to make the best of it," rejoined Mrs. Brantynham, folding her hands and calling an expression of social martyrdom into her face. "She has so many eccentricities, quite unlike any one I have ever seen before."

"But she is very beautiful," rejoined Mrs. Latham; "such a face might have turned a wiser head than Jasper Brantynham's."

While they re-entered the house and continued their twaddling in a small slan-

derous way, Philippa was wandering distractedly under the shadow of the green trees; her brain seemed bursting, and her heart ached with a dull leaden pain. She could not have gone back to the house and encountered the faces there, nor indeed would she return till she had calmed her mind, and had time to re-adjust the conventional mask upon her face which Mrs. Latham's communication had torn aside. She wanted to be alone, that she might think freely, out in the quiet solitude of the woods and fields, when she knew that no prying eyes were fixed upon her face to read, or mis-read what they found there. Somehow she began to feel as though the family circle was weaving a sort of spell round her which gave them power to drag her secret thoughts to light. Joseph Atherton's insinuation the day before he left the Hall had filled her with angry indignation, and

she had set down his accusation against Jasper as arising from some base feeling which he called "love" for her, or to envy and jealousy of the man he chose to consider his rival. But here was a stranger, a chance visitor to the house, who almost echoed his words; and did not insinuate, but stated a fact. What could it all mean? Oh! if she could only stand face to face with Jasper for a single hour and learn the truth. She pondered and pondered till she worked her mind into a whirl of anguish; she went over all the circumstances of their acquaintance from the very beginning. She remembered how in her first trouble she had gone to *him* for advice, and in what a healthful manly spirit he had encouraged and made her strong to struggle through the difficulties which were crowding round her.

He had always been kind and generous,

a tender and true friend, till that day when her distress had surprised him into an expression of something more than friendship—and she, ah! she had cared for him so long and so well, she had perhaps been too free to give, too eager to take love for love—she had seized upon his professions too quickly; it might be that he had never really meant anything, had been engaged to Kate, and loving her all that time, and yet given to her, Philippa, only a friendly affection, born of his good heart, highly coloured for the moment, yes, perhaps for the moment, and deepened by her visible distress. She had heard him say, in his genial way, that the sight of beauty in tears was difficult to withstand—she laid these words to her heart now, and her cheeks burned with shame—suppose he had been attracted by her face, and for the hour swerved in his allegiance to his betrothed,

lost control over himself, and, in his passion of a moment, spoken those words, which should have died and been forgotten when the passion passed. But she had seized them, treasured them, kept them alive, and shown him her own warm loving heart, which was his—his long before he had asked for it—then seeing her mighty love for him, he had gone on from day to day, never having courage to tell her she had deceived herself, till in pure and tender compassion for her thickening afflictions, and in appreciation of her too evident affection, seeing how she and her poor feeble-minded father needed a protector, he had sacrificed himself and married her—married her, loving this quiet, brown-eyed Kate the while.

She knew from her own observation of life that men will sometimes shrink from facing a small evil, and will avoid it till it

grows giant-like, and stands before them and blocks their life, and they must look up and strive, and have a double suffering at last.

The one weak point in Jasper's character was a sensitive shrinking away from any unpleasant scene or circumstance. He would not (speaking figuratively) take the bull by the horns, but waited till it had gored him before he turned about to face it. She thought and thought, till she fancied her solution of the matter must be the right one; she could understand *now* why he was so averse from announcing his marriage at Brantynham: of course he wished to pave the way, that the blow might fall more softly on Kate.

Still, with all her ingenuity at self-torture, she could hardly comprehend why he had brought her down to Brantynham at all. Surely he might easily have kept her

and Kate apart; there was no necessity for them to be brought together in the familiar intercourse of daily life. Why had he done this? Had he suddenly resolved on strong measures? Had he thought to cure Kate's love for him by showing his own, or the semblance of his own love for another? and had he miscalculated his strength, and finding he had not power to endure the ordeal, seized gladly on this chance, and gone to Calcutta, leaving *her* to bear whatever there might be to be borne alone!

Her cheek burned. "No," she thought, "no! he might do a weak or foolish, but never a mean or cowardly thing." No doubt he had gone away that she might win their hearts during his absence. No doubt he calculated that natural delicacy, coupled with regard for him, would keep the family from alluding to what "had been." Ah, she thought, she had now

found out the reason why she was never allowed to go about the place alone! Of course it was by Jasper's desire, in order that no idle gossip should reach her ear, and she might be kept in ignorance of what chance had revealed to her. This was plain to her eyes now, and she reproached herself for misconstruing the watchful kindness of those about her—but was it kindness? The brief conversation she had heard that day referring to Miss Broderip's marriage came back to her mind, and the question suggested itself, Was it a kind or friendly spirit which allowed the conversation to drift into that direction, and kept it there? She wondered and doubted. Common delicacy should have prevented the subject from being discussed in her presence, situated as she was in the family. Her cheeks burned, her heart beat, and an indignant spirit of rebellion took possession

of her. She would not stay there to be suspected, scorned, and watched perpetually. She would go home to her father.

Then she remembered that let things be as they would—however painful or perplexing they might be—she was Jasper's wife. He had left her there, under his father's roof, and he went away under the full conviction that she was to remain there until his return. He might be angry at her leaving, and set down the agitating feelings that distressed her, to want of trust and faith in him. Well, whatever might happen, she would remain there; and she calmed herself (with a most false calm) and turned her steps towards the Hall.

The clouds had burst overhead, and the rain was falling fast, but she went on, unconscious that she was being drenched to the skin. But all the rain in heaven would



CHAPTER X.

PERPLEXED IN THE EXTREME.

IN about a week from his time of starting, Joseph Atherton returned to Brantingham Hall, having apparently quite recovered his usual equanimity, and things went on much the same as usual. In obedience to Philippa's desire he avoided her, at least it must have been design, not accident, which prevented their ever encountering each other alone, either in the house or out of it; but of course, when the family were assembled together, or at any time when other people were by, they behaved rationally, and joined in the general conversation, or occasionally exchanged a word or sentiment

with one another, as the case might be, and to all outward appearance they were as good friends as any lady and gentleman need to be, who are not especially attracted towards each other. Philippa on the whole, was perhaps a little more silent and self-absorbed, and taking less pleasure in things around her, and occasionally there was a slight satire in her expressions, a bitterness in her tone, which contrasted strangely with her general high-mindedness; but she kept sacredly secret the information she had received from Mrs. Latham. It was not that she had forgotten a word, or that the words had less weight than when she had first heard them; on the contrary, she stored them up in her breast and brooded over them, till her heart grew sick and her cheek pale. That which in many girls so circumstanced would have occasioned an outbreak of tears, or a storm of regrets

and mutual confidences, had sunk into her soul; it might be convulsing her whole nature and rending her heart in twain, but the world would know nothing of all this, it would only see the smoke when the battle was over. Outwardly the change in her was slight, and she went through the daily routine of life as usual, but there was a great revolution going on within her mind.

Time passed on, the days coming and going one after another in a dull monotonous march, till the Autumn had almost departed and Winter began to show his frosty face upon the land. Another mail was in from India, and brought letters for Brantynham Hall. Philippa watched as the post-bag was opened and emptied upon the table, her quick eyes caught sight of the double cream-coloured postage-stamps. She stretched out her hand and smiled. Mrs. Brantynham smiled also.

“Nothing for you this mail, my dear; this letter is for Mr. Brantynham.”

Philippa's heart sank and contracted with disappointment; a white mist fell before her eyes.

Mrs. Brantynham went to her husband's bedside and read Jasper's letter aloud to him there, and took his directions for writing a reply. Then returning to Philippa with the letter in her hand she said—

“Here's a message for you, my dear, Jasper's kind love and—but you may as well hear what he says,” and she read, or seemed to read from the letter, “Kind love to Philippa; I hope you find her a pleasant companion. Tell her I am always thinking of her, but I cannot write to her as often as I should like; I am so overwhelmed with business it is impossible to find time for everything.” As she refolded the letter and

placed it in her pocket, she added, "Poor fellow, he must be harassed to death: there seems to be no chance of his coming back for some time to come."

Philippa received the message without comment or remark; she simply said, "Thank you," and continued her work. As soon as she could do so without attracting attention or remark, she went up to her room and sat down to write a long loving letter to Jasper, full of tender longings to see his face again, mastering her pen and subduing her burning spirit—writing, as she thought, nothing that could grieve or vex him; but she could not help unconsciously showing she was wounded, she did not care to receive a message, even from him, that must be filtered through Mrs. Brantynham's lips, and first read by Mrs. Brantynham's eyes. "She was content here in his father's house," she

said, "but she could not say happy, when she was full of anxieties for him. When was there a chance of his coming back? She wanted to see him, to ask him some things which perplexed her; things that he could answer in a moment if they stood face to face, but could not be written down." Having finished her letter and sent it off, she resolved to wait his answer with what patience she could. She knew that weary days and weeks must pass before there was a possibility of her receiving any answering communication from him.

The next morning was damp and cold, and they all collected in the cosy library which is generally the most comfortable room in all houses, and certainly was so in Brantynham Hall. A brisk fire was blazing in the grate, the rain was pitter-pattering against the window, the wind sweeping and roaring round the house, whistling through

the keyholes as though it had travelled miles and miles and brought a message for some one within. Mr. Atherton was at the escritoire busy with accounts, Mrs. Brantynham sat spelling over the *Times*, Philippa was drawing, and Kate trying to force a red rose to blow in Berlin wool-work. Morning visitors (and only those who are on intimate terms with the family come on a morning call), were received in the library, or wherever the family happened to be at the moment; at this special moment, while they were all silently pursuing their several occupations, the door was opened and "Colonel Vane" was announced.

He was received by the family generally with that warm greeting which we give to a friend after a long absence; while they were all busy shaking him by the hand and giving him a cordial welcome back to Brantynham, Philippa bent her head over her

drawing, and though her cheek burned with blushes, her blood seemed to run cold, her heart to stand still as his name fell upon her ear, "Colonel Vane."

She did not lift up her head in case their eyes might meet, and he should discover in Miss Maitland at Brantynham, the Mrs. Brantynham of Paris. How well she remembered their meeting! What should she do? What could she do? At that moment all the wrong, all the wilful madness she had committed in consenting to accept this false position, even for "Jasper's sake," swept with the fullest force, the keenest anguish through her mind. She felt more than half inclined to turn round like a stag at bay and assert herself; bitter indeed as the assertion would be, and tantamount to an acknowledgment that she was a liar and an impostor; better bear that, than let the purity of her womanhood,

the sanctity of her character, be tainted in a man's eyes or thoughts even for a moment. The colour in her cheeks was fading fast, giving place to a deathlike pallor, everything seemed to turn dark and swim before her eyes, and the voices round her beat upon the drums of her ears like a surging sea of sound. Mrs. Brantynham touched her lightly on the shoulder as she said in her usual honeyed tones—

“Philippa, my dear, let me introduce you to Colonel Vane; Colonel Vane, Miss Maitland.” Then, though she felt as if her heart had ceased to beat, her blood to flow, she rose up to her full stately height, raised her head proudly, and turned to face him. Their eyes met: in hers there was a strange expression of half-humiliation, half-shrinking fear, dashed with defiance; in his there was no expression at all, no glimmer of recognition, no look of surprise. He

merely gave her the courteous glance and bow, which any gentleman might give to any lady on their first introduction to each other. A great weight rolled from Philippa's heart. "Thank God he has forgotten me," trembled mutely on her lips. He merely said something about having the pleasure of making her acquaintance, "and this being her first visit to Brantynham," &c., and then the conversation became general, and she joined in it scarcely at all. Meanwhile, Joseph Atherton, who never lost an opportunity of gazing stealthily at the beautiful face that had bewitched him, had noticed the expression of her countenance and the signs of agitation which had escaped the observation of other eyes; then he turned his attention to Colonel Vane, but that gentleman's impassible face told him nothing. Having paid rather a long visit, he apologized for

taking up so much of the ladies' time, adding—

“When a man has been knocking about the world for six months, he cannot resist the pleasure of a real home gossip on his return.”

“Laura gave us news of you sometimes,” rejoined Mrs. Brantynham; “she told us you had joined the honey-mooning couple on their wedding tour.”

“Not exactly,” he answered; “but I spent a few very pleasant days with them in Paris.”

“Have they returned to town yet?” inquired Kate.

“No; I started them about six weeks ago for Switzerland. They are making a regular grand tour. I dare say they are turning their faces towards Rome by this time; my sister Edie is with them, you know—she and Mrs. Mackenzie are such intimate friends

they like to be together. It is a good opportunity for Edie to see things and places which she might otherwise never have a chance of visiting."

He rose to go, took his leave of the ladies, and Mr. Atherton went out with him into the hall, put on his "wide-awake" and overcoat, and volunteered to walk with him across the park. On the way he observed casually—

"We have made an addition and a great acquisition to our family since you left us."

"So I perceive," replied Colonel Vane, "presuming you allude to the young lady to whom Mrs. Brantynham introduced me; Miss — I did not quite catch her name."

"Maitland," replied Joseph; "I fancied you knew one another, or at least were not quite strangers."

"Did you?—then you must have thought me remarkably slow in claiming her acquaintance."

"Well, I believe you London people meet in so many ways and places, you may know one another very well without being exactly acquainted, or even knowing one another's names. Don't you think she is wonderfully beautiful?"

"I think she is the most glorious-looking creature I ever saw," replied Colonel Vane; "a noble type of a woman, such as we rarely see."

"Ay, and once seen not easily forgotten—eh, Colonel?"

"Not easily indeed," replied the Colonel, thoughtfully.

Mr. Atherton thought he was more reticent on the subject than need be. He could not understand any man being less enthusiastic than himself where Philippa's

beauty was concerned—and though Colonel Vane's wordy appreciation of her charms was strong—there was no life in his admiration, and his manner was constrained.

“Jasper's regularly hard hit this time,” said Atherton, moodily. “I believe it is a case with him—and after all's come and gone between him and Kate, it is rather hard on us—especially as she brings no money, no influence, no anything into the family—she seems to have no friends or relations except an imbecile father whom we have never seen—we know nothing of her but her name.”

“That will be quite enough for the parson to know,” replied Colonel Vane, smiling. “I suppose it is to end at the altar, where beauty and folly often go together.”

“Perhaps,” said Atherton, as they reached the park gates, where they shook hands and

parted, and he retraced his steps, baulked but not baffled. Colonel Vane went his way homeward, twisting his pointed moustache in some perplexity. Of course, at the first glance, he had recognised the lady whom his old friend Jasper had introduced to him in Paris as "my wife," and the fact of meeting the same lady there in his father's house as "Miss Maitland," struck him with a feeling of painful bewilderment and surprise, though he had too great command over himself to allow his face to say as much. He could put but one interpretation on the matter—any man of the world would have done the same—and that interpretation was not to Philippa's advantage. He had been struck by her pure and noble style of beauty when he first saw her face, and it gave him a slight shock to find that she was not so pure and true as she seemed to be. What was she doing there?


and What on earth is Jasper about? he muttered to himself as he strode furiously along; and he lost himself in vague perplexity. It was against his will that Philippa had been discussed at all between him and Joseph Atherton. Colonel Vane, a high-bred gentleman and a soldier, had an instinctive feeling that Joseph Atherton was a sneak, perhaps something worse, and he held no more communication with him than neighbourly courtesy demanded; he would have scouted the idea of taking him into his confidence in any matter, where even the honour of a stranger was concerned. He would as soon have given a woman's tender limbs to be torn by a wild tiger, as laid her reputation at the mercy of Joseph Atherton. Hence, when he and Philippa had stood face to face, he made no sign—and when Joseph Atherton afterwards dragged her name into their discourse, ^{he}

had been reserved in his observations and remarks, and silent concerning the suspicion under which in his mind she lay. He was rather puzzled himself to know what he should do, what course of conduct he should take for the future. The idea of giving to the Brantynham family any information which might be injurious to Philippa never crossed his mind; he would rather have cut out his tongue than used it to wound a woman's fame, though it might be damaged already.

A gentleman in private life cannot turn informer, and Colonel Vane would not employ his energies in hunting a woman down, however equivocal her character or position might be. Her presence there was strange, was unaccountable to him. What could Jasper be thinking of? He might at least have kept his amours from his own fireside, and—from Kate Atherton, upon

whom Colonel Vane looked with kindly eyes. However, it was not *his* place to meddle in matters that did not concern him. He decided that he would visit at Brantynham Hall just as usual, he was not afraid of catching any moral disease from Miss Maitland; but he would take care that the visiting between the ladies of his family and Brantynham should slacken until Philippa's departure; though how he should manage to keep them apart without giving his reasons he did not know, but he would trust to his wits, and certainly on no account take any one into his confidence. Perhaps when he and Jasper met they might talk over affairs, until then he would keep secret as the grave.

A few days after Colonel Vane's visit, a family conclave was held at Brantynham as to the advisability of having a formal dinner party. These mournful festivities



were generally conducted on the reciprocity system; a debtor and creditor score being indifferently well kept among them. Mrs. Brantynham had been casting up her accounts, and found herself terribly in debt—indebted at the least fifty dinners to fifty different family—she felt she must clear off these liabilities. Mr. Brantynham was better, and was able to sit up some hours every day, and with the aid of a stick could creep from one room to another—indeed he had rallied as much as it was likely he ever would rally. He might live for years in the state he was now in, provided he was kept quiet and free from all excitement. They had had a consultation of London physicians, and such was their report. This being the case, Mrs. Brantynham decided that it was no use postponing the exchange of sociabilities with their neighbours.

“Society demands that we fulfil our duties,” she said emphatically; Kate accordingly sat down pen in hand, and made out the list according to her mother’s directions. Colonel, Mrs., and the Misses Vane were first upon the list. The company being settled, and the day fixed, the invitations were written and sent off. In due time the answered acceptations came pouring in; among them was an epistle from Colonel Vane, who had “much pleasure in accepting Mrs. Brantynham’s kind invitation. Mrs. and the Misses Vane, however, regretted their inability to avail themselves of it.” On reading these epistles Kate exclaimed—

“How odd; they don’t say they are engaged, and I am sure they are not, for there is nothing going on for miles round, and I know they are not ill or we should have heard of it. They simply wont come

and don't say why; I like to have a reason for everything."

"Wouldn't it be rather hard to be compelled to give a reason for such a trifling thing as declining a dinner-party?" asked Philippa.

"I don't know," answered Kate; "I should think it was just as easy to give a reason for one thing as another."

"But not always equally pleasant," exclaimed Mr. Atherton, who happened to be present. "I wonder if Miss Maitland would care to tell us the reason why she blushed to such an extent when she was introduced to Colonel Vane."

"That is a very impertinent wonder, Joe," said Kate, quickly; "don't answer him, Philippa. Things are coming to a pretty pass when a girl is called upon to give a reason for blushing."

"Pshaw! how seriously you take it, I

was only jesting," he answered, noticing the deepening angry flush on Philippa's face.


"I am blushing now," she answered, throwing a glance of dislike and contempt upon him, "to think that I must be subjected to your impertinent jesting, whether I will or not."

She felt she should know no peace where Joseph Atherton was. He had, however, kept his word, insomuch as he never interrupted her in her walks, nor sought her company when she was alone in the house; so far she had felt beholden to him; but now, for the future, no matter who was present, she would always feel that his eye was upon her; that he was noting her words, her very looks, and whether she blushed or no; she knew now that he would try to worm out whatever she wished to hide.

Meanwhile another mail came in from India; by this she would surely have an answer to her letter. Mrs. Brantynham slowly unlocked the post-bag, and commenced sorting the letters, while Philippa's eyes were fixed upon her with burning eagerness.

"Here's one for you, my dear," said Mrs. Brantynham. As Philippa stretched out her hand to receive it her face grew radiant with delight, then paled with sudden disappointment. The letter was not from Jasper, it was from her father. Her heart sank heavy as lead with disappointment. She had buoyed herself up to this time, looking forward, yearning, trusting, living in the hope of Jasper's answering love. He could have poured out his soul on paper and sent it to her, though he was thousands of miles away; but there was nothing for her, not a line, not a word! it was cold

cruel neglect after her tender appeal to him. Now there was no possibility of hearing from him for another month. How should she live through it? Hope deferred maketh the heart sick—and hers was sick nigh unto death already. Oh! if she had been in some wild deserted place, that she might indulge her grief alone, without comment or remark. She was vexed at her own white tell-tale face, whose expression she could not control; she knew it would herald her bitter disappointment to any eyes that chose to look upon her. She knew she would have to run the gauntlet of all the family eyes and tongues. There was Kate, the odious Joe, and even old Mr. Brantynham would be sure to inquire, "The mail in, my dear—what news from Jasper?" she must answer "None." They would know by her voice, by her face, how much she was hurt and disappointed; perhaps



they would condole with her and excuse him in their irritating, though well-meaning and tactless way—she shrank from the idea of strange voices coming between her and Jasper. Her spirit seemed to writhe beneath its disappointment, not only for its own sake, but because other eyes beheld it.

The feeling that she is neglected by those she loves, is perhaps the bitterest thing a woman's heart can know, and the fact that such neglect is patent to those around her, aggravates the pain. Philippa would fain have put on a reckless manner, have called up careless words and smiles upon her lips; but she knew that any attempt at such seeming would be a miserable failure. She sat there with her father's unopened letter in her hand; the time had been when she would have torn it open, eager to learn how the old man fared;

now all interests in life save the one, seemed to be blotted out. Mrs. Brantynham was seated opposite to her, opening and reading her own letters; but she cast more than one quick furtive glance at Philippa. At last she said—

“I’m very sorry for you, my dear, but it is no use to take on about it—men will be men, you know—out of sight is sometimes out of mind, they cannot always keep their affections up to boiling-point, especially when we are not there to stir the fire—you mustn’t be too hard on Jasper—I know he has a great deal of business to pull through, and of course he will amuse himself a little, though I must say I think he *ought* to have written.”

“I don’t complain,” replied Philippa, calmly.

“Umph! no, my dear, not in words—common modesty would prevent that, and

I like to see a proper pride in women; but I have got eyes and see you suffer—you're too sensitive, Philippa, far too sensitive for your own happiness; besides, it is always foolish to feel too much, especially when men are concerned, for you are sure to have your feelings pretty well tried."

"It is foolish," exclaimed Philippa, rising up with one heavy sigh, and turning a smiling face to Mrs. Brantynham. "You shall see no more of it. I will go upstairs and hear what papa has got to say." She threw another smile over her shoulder as she left the room.

The old man's letter was filled with an account of his feeble pains and feeble pleasures. He seemed to be well content; Martha took great care of him, he said, but still he missed his child, though no doubt amidst the luxury and grandeur of Brantynham, she had quite forgotten her old

father. "When was her marriage to be made known to Jasper's father?" he asked. "He wished to address his daughter by her husband's name; things did not seem quite satisfactory to him while he was obliged to call her Miss Maitland." One bit of news his letter contained, which in their days of poverty would have driven her wild with joy. A distant relative on her mother's side had left her a legacy of five hundred pounds; but of course the money could not be got for some months to come. There was an ill-written scrap of crumpled paper enclosed from Martha, containing a long gushing message of fond affection and humble duty to her darling. No matter if she was the wife of a Duke, she would always be old Martha's darling child, whom she had nursed at her breast, and loved better and better every day of her life. The scrawl was ill-written and ill-spelt; but there was the ring

of true honest affection in it that went to her heart and drew the grateful tears from her eyes. There was somebody in the world who loved her, though he could neglect, perhaps forget her.

While she was sitting there lost in thought, the door opened, and Kate came into the room. She had been busy with the gardeners in the conservatory and greenhouse, cutting, clipping, and superintending the potting of flowers; she had stolen a few of the sweetest for the vase in Philippa's room, and came in, nominally to place them there, but in reality because she wanted to have a little private talk with her. She made her smile and admire the flowers; then, having arranged them to her satisfaction, she seated herself opposite to Philippa and began chatting in a light girlish fashion, though she could not help noticing Philippa's abstracted look and listless manner;

presently after a momentary pause she said quietly, though with a slight flush upon her cheek—

“Philippa, may I ask you a question?”

“Yes,” she answered, “but I don’t promise to answer it.”

“Well, I want to know what has gone wrong between you and my brother Joe?” said Kate; “you used to be such good friends, and you were always together, walking, driving, or riding.”

“I have done with my lessons,” replied Philippa, quickly, “and now I prefer riding with you or the groom.”

“It isn’t that,” rejoined Kate. “I’m sure there’s been a split between you, and I want to know what it was about. You may as well tell me, for if you don’t I shall be sure to find it out.” She leaned her arms upon the table and looked resolutely at Philippa.

"I have nothing to tell," she answered.
"You know, dear, one sometimes gets tired of doing always the same thing."

"A proud reserved girl like you does not change as you have changed without a reason," rejoined Kate.

Philippa was not in a very amiable mood, and she was beginning to feel irritated at Kate's persistency.

"I hate to be questioned," she said impatiently; then added in her old sweet voice, "I know you mean it kindly, dear Kate, but please don't force me to speak when I wish to be silent. There is nothing wrong between me and anybody, at least nothing that can concern you, dear, or that you can remedy."

"But it may concern somebody else," said Kate, and for a moment they were both silent; her small lips being pressed close together, as though she were making up

her mind to something. Then lifting her head quickly, she said—

“Look here, Philippa. I dare say you will think I am doing a very wrong and unsisterly thing in speaking as I do, but I don’t care. I can’t force myself to respect and adore my brother against my will. I know him, and—and,” she added with quick fluttering breath, “I fancy he has been telling lies about a better man than himself; if he has, don’t believe him. I am not saying this so much for your sake as for Jasper’s. He loves you, and I will not have your mind poisoned against him while he is away and cannot defend himself.”

She had scarcely finished speaking when Philippa flung her arms round her neck and burst into a flood of tears, exclaiming—

“Kate, Kate! you are a nobler, truer girl than I; if I have ever been rude or

sullen to you, forgive me, forgive me! I have been foolish, stung, maddened by the thought that he loved you first, loved you best! and you—Oh! is it true, Kate, tell me, is it true?"

Kate knitted her brows and winced slightly under Philippa's searching eyes.

"Who has put such a thought as that in your mind?" she answered. "You *are* foolish, mad indeed to meddle with what does not concern you. What is his past or mine to you? What matter who he has loved or who has loved him? he loves you, and has chosen you, casting all other women aside. He has chosen you out of all the world! Oh! Philippa dear, be content—be content."

"But did he ever love you, Kate?" whispered Philippa.

"No, never!" she answered, "I wish to God he had! I should have known how to

value him. I would not have doubted and questioned as you are doing now."

"I see, I see," exclaimed Philippa, drooping her head.

"Ay, you see," said Kate; "but there may be no grain of truth of all your seeing."

"You have not set my mind at rest," continued Philippa, "nor answered me as frankly as I thought you would."

"How can I be more frank?" she answered. "I have told you Jasper never cared for me, is not that enough?"

"No," replied Philippa, "for you say that with a tinge of bitterness and reserve, as though he had led you to believe he did and deceived you."

"Don't think that, Philippa; don't think that," said Kate, earnestly. "I may have deceived myself—what I have thought, what I have hoped, and what might once

have been, is all past now—gone and over. I am glad things are as they are, believe me, Philippa, I am glad. Jasper is the very best, noblest, and dearest fellow in the world—and you—you ought to be the happiest woman.”

“Ought I?” rejoined Philippa, and there was a slight suspicion of satire in her tone. She twined her arms round Kate, and drew her to her, and laid her head upon her breast as she kissed her cheek and murmured in a low voice, “You are more worthy of him than I—I wish I could give him up to you, Kate, I wish to God I could.”

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